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The Alter-Imperial Paradigm

Empire Studies & the Book of Revelation

By

Shane J. Wood



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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wood, Shane J.

The alter-imperial paradigm : empire studies & the book of Revelation / by Shane J. Wood.
pages cm. — (Biblical interpretation series, ISSN 0928-0731 ; Volume 140)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-90-04-30802-2 (hardback : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-90-04-30839-8 (e-book : alk. paper)

1. Bible. Revelation—Postcolonial criticism. 2. Imperialism—Biblical teaching. 3. Scott, James C. I. Title.
BS2825.52.W66 2015
228'.06—dc23

2015035170

This publication has been typeset in the multilingual “Brill” typeface. With over 5,100 characters covering Latin, IPA, Greek, and Cyrillic, this typeface is especially suitable for use in the humanities.
For more information, please see www.brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 0928-0731

ISBN 978-9004-30802-2 (hardback)

ISBN 978-9004-30839-8 (e-book)

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*For Sara,
To the moon and back*



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Acknowledgements

To adequately express gratitude to everyone involved in this journey from dissertation-to-publication strikes me as potentially insuperable. Yet, I could not, in good conscience, allow the reader to move into the content of this work without acknowledging that this venture was anything but individual; like many valuable things in life, this project reflects community.

First, I would like to thank everyone who read and offered invaluable insights on the various iterations of this manuscript, specifically: Mike Ackerman, Michael DeFazio, John Hunter, Chris Keith, Matthew Novenson, Meri Rogers, Jessica Scheuermann, and Doug Welch.

Special thanks to Zach Taylor for his incredible work on gathering the various images and the corresponding copyrights. Additionally, I would like to thank Classical Numismatic Group Inc., ACR Auctions, James Steakley (in partnership with WikiMedia), and Ira & Larry Goldberg Coins & Collectibles Inc. for kindly allowing the reproduction of their respective artifact images. Travis A. Markel (Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.) went above and beyond in his assistance, for which I am truly grateful.

My brothers, Justin and Jordan Wood, deserve an inordinate amount of gratitude due to the hours of discussion, revision, and even domicile intrusion for weeks at a time to write. Without you, this project, like life, just would not be what it is.

I am also indebted to my community of mentors, friends, and family, who believed in me and challenged me, at times, in spite of me: Chris DeWalt, Nathan Horton, Josh Huckabay, Robert A. Lowery, Mark E. Moore, Josh Quade, and my parents. I hope this makes you proud.

To my advisor *par excellence*, Helen Bond, thank you for amiably guiding this work from its inception. Your gracious critiques and persistent support brought this project to maturation and, at times, redeemed my sanity.

I would also like to thank Paul Anderson and Liesbeth Hugenholtz for patiently and enthusiastically directing me through the publication process with Brill.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my wife, Sara, and my four children: Zion, Paige, Maddox, and Robert. Words are not enough to express my gratitude for your unmatched love, adventurous spirits, and resilient strength throughout this journey. You keep me grounded, you keep me smiling, and for reasons more numerous than the words of this monograph, this work belongs to you.

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABul	<i>Art Bulletin</i>
AgrH	<i>Agricultural History</i>
AHR	<i>American Historical Review</i>
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
AJP	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
ANF	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
APSR	<i>American Political Science Review</i>
AThR	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
AZ	<i>Archäologische Zeitung</i>
BAG	Bauer, W., W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 2d ed. Chicago, 1979
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETS	<i>Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche
CBCNT	Collegeville Bible Commentary New Testament
ChrH	<i>Christian History</i>
CInq	<i>Critical Inquiry</i>
CJ	<i>Classical Journal</i>
CP	<i>Classical Philology</i>
CSCA	<i>California Studies in Classical Antiquity</i>
CSSH	<i>Comparative Studies in Society and History</i>
DTT	<i>Dansk teologisk tidsskrift</i>
EdF	Erträge der Forschung
EvJ	<i>Evangelical Journal</i>
EvQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
ExpTim	<i>Expository Times</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments

<i>FNRev</i>	<i>Fortnightly Review</i>
<i>GR</i>	<i>Greece and Rome</i>
<i>GW</i>	<i>Good Words</i>
<i>HeyJ</i>	<i>Heythrop Journal</i>
<i>HDR</i>	Harvard Dissertations in Religion
<i>HNT</i>	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
<i>HSCP</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>IBC</i>	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
<i>ICC</i>	International Critical Commentary
<i>IDB</i>	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by G.A. Buttrick. 4 vols. Nashville, 1962
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>IVPNT</i>	IVP New Testament Commentary Series
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JdI</i>	<i>Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JÖAI</i>	<i>Jahreshefte des Österreichischen archäologischen Instituts</i>
<i>JMH</i>	<i>Journal of Modern History</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSL</i>	<i>Journal of Sacred Literature</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>JWCI</i>	<i>Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes</i>
<i>MAAR</i>	<i>Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome</i>
<i>NCB</i>	New Century Bible
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
<i>NIBCNT</i>	New International Biblical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NICNT</i>	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NIGTC</i>	New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NIVAC</i>	NIV Application Commentary
<i>NLR</i>	<i>New Literatures Review</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NRTh</i>	<i>La nouvelle revue théologique</i>
<i>NTD</i>	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
<i>NTL</i>	New Testament Library
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>NumC</i>	<i>Numismatic Chronicle</i>

<i>OpRom</i>	<i>Opuscula Romana</i>
<i>PhilPR</i>	<i>Philosophy and Phenomenological Research</i>
<i>PP</i>	<i>Past and Present</i>
<i>RelEd</i>	<i>Religious Education</i>
<i>RefR</i>	<i>Reformed Review</i>
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
<i>Rev</i>	<i>Review</i>
<i>RevH</i>	<i>Review historique</i>
<i>RMit</i>	<i>Römische Mitteilungen</i>
<i>SCIsr</i>	<i>Studia Classica Israelica</i>
<i>SemeiaSt</i>	<i>Semeia Studies</i>
<i>SBLDS</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series</i>
<i>SMRev</i>	<i>St. Mark's Review</i>
<i>SocT</i>	<i>Social Text</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Sacra Pagina</i>
<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>TNTC</i>	<i>Tyndale New Testament Commentaries</i>
<i>TRu</i>	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>TU</i>	<i>Texte und Untersuchungen</i>
<i>USQR</i>	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae christianae</i>
<i>WBC</i>	<i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>WUNT</i>	<i>Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</i>
<i>WW</i>	<i>Word and World</i>
<i>ZAG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

Introduction

How Does the Book of Revelation Interact with the Roman Empire?

This question has consumed much of the scholarly interest in the Apocalypse of John over the past 125 years. Engaged directly and indirectly, it motivates intertextual explorations (both in the Old Testament and Graeco-Roman sources), historical inquiries, and sociological investigations. While the question is rarely stated, it, nevertheless, guides considerations and conclusions for the multilayered imagery in the text of Revelation as well as examinations and determinations about the socio-historical setting of the text's audience. Regardless of the scholarly trajectory, the history of research for the Apocalypse of John persistently engages this key question: How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?

Similar queries dominate the broader biblical scholarship in recent Empire Studies in the disciplines of Paul and Jesus.¹ To match these projects, the question is, at times, rephrased: 'How does Paul interact with the Roman Empire?' or 'How does Jesus interact with the Roman Empire?' The advances of Empire Studies in Paul and Jesus have reinvigorated the imperial inquiry into the Apocalypse of John. Though not always acknowledged, Revelation research over the past 125 years has struggled with this question that now arises afresh.

The Journey of the Question: Revelation Research of the Past 125 Years

In 1934, Ernst Lohmeyer lamented the relatively little advancement in Revelation research in his time: "Es gibt wenige urchristliche Schriften, die im ganzen wie im einzelnen in den letzten 14 Jahren so viel umworben sind und dennoch in dem Geheimnis ihrer Geschichte wie ihres Sinnes unberührt zu wohnen scheinen wie die Offenbarung Johannis."² Setting aside the theological

¹ For a full discussion, see chapters 1 and 2 below.

² Ernst Lohmeyer, "Die Offenbarung des Johannes 1920–1934," *TRu* 6 (1934): 270. G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: Lane, 1908), 17 humorously concurs: "Critics are much madder than poets . . . And though St. John the Evangelist saw many strange monsters in his vision, he saw no creature so wild as one of his own commentators."

mayhem that assails Revelation at the popular level,³ modern critical scholarship echoes Lohmeyer's frustration, and yet, significant developments are evident, particularly in regard to the question: How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire? Examining three approaches to the Apocalypse over the past 125 years brings to light these developments: intertextual explorations (Old Testament and Graeco-Roman sources), historical inquiries, and sociological investigations.⁴

Intertextual Explorations

The saturation of the Apocalypse with Old Testament allusions has long been recognized. In 1895, Hermann Gunkel compared Job 40–41 with Revelation 13,⁵ and Henry Barclay Swete's 1911 commentary presented linguistic comparisons

-
- 3 While some scholars describe Revelation as a 'maze' [Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992)], others suggest the book is a worthless pursuit that should be abandoned altogether. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 12 points out, due to the obsession of American fundamentalist writers—who ensnare the text in theological systems and constructs—and the "elusive meaning of Revelation," the scholarly community did not seriously engage Revelation "in the research period 1945–1979." The theological discussions, however, had a strong presence in popular literature, primarily in America, espousing various 'millennial' positions. For further study, see Barbara R. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Basic Books, 2004); Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis & Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 13–22; Fiorenza, *Justice*, 1–32.
 - 4 In any survey work, there is a danger to oversimplify multiple authors' work(s). Thus, the placement of Revelation scholars into these categories does not intend to depreciate their unique emphases and important contributions. The scholars are merely examples of the three dominant approaches in Revelation scholarship over the past 125 years. Additionally, these categories are not mutually exclusive. Often Revelation scholars use a combination of all three categories (and even, at times, the theological category). For example, Steven J. Friesen's work, although primarily focused on the socio-historical setting of the Apocalypse in relation to the Roman imperial cult, uses Old Testament texts (Daniel 7; Job 40–41; Isaiah 51:9–11; Ezek 29:3–5; 32:2–8; Jer 51:34–37) to connect Revelation 13 to the Roman Empire [Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 175; see also J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (JSNTSup 132; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1996), 143–163]. So, if a scholar's work is discussed in the 'intertextual explorations' category, it does not mean that they do not use 'history' or 'sociology.'
 - 5 Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895), 51–61. Cf. Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (5d ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), 435–436.

between Old Testament texts and the corresponding Revelation allusions.⁶ A variety of other projects appeared in the subsequent decades on Revelation's Old Testament intertextuality,⁷ and yet, in the early 1980's Christopher Rowland accurately exclaims, "The use of Scripture in the apocalypses is a subject which is only just being investigated in any detail. Preliminary results suggest both that it is a field which demands further study and that many apocalyptic visions may have their origin in the study of Scripture."⁸

Over the past 30 years, Revelation scholarship has responded with enlightening Old Testament connections to the Apocalypse as clarifying referents for the disorienting imagery⁹—some studies argue for over 500 allusions

6 Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (New York: MacMillan, 1906; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), cxi–clviii.

7 R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 1:358; E.B. Allo, *Saint Jean: L'Apocalypse* (4d ed.; Paris: Gabalda, 1933), 223; J. Cambier, "Les images de l'Ancien Testament dans l'Apocalypse de Saint Jean," *NRTh* 77 (1955): 113–22; Albert Vanhoye, "L'utilisation du livre d'Ezéchiel dans l'Apocalypse," *Bib* 43 (1962): 436–476; André Feuillet, *L'Apocalypse: état de la question* (Paris: Desclée, 1963), 65; G.B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John* (BNTC 19; London: A&C Black, 1966; repr., Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 161–162; Paul S. Minear, *I Saw a New Earth: An Introduction to the Visions of the Apocalypse* (Washington: Corpus, 1969; repr., Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 300–365; Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (HNT 16; Tübingen: Mohr, 1970), 111, 143, 161, 163; Heinrich Kraft, "Zur Offenbarung des Johannes," *TRu* 38 (1973): 81–98; idem, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (HNT 16a; Tübingen: Mohr, 1974), 16, 179; Christian Wolff, *Jeremia im Frühjudentum und Urchristentum* (TU 118; Berlin: Academy, 1976), 166–174; Ferrell Jenkins, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

8 Christopher Rowland, *Christian Origins* (London: SPCK, 1985), 62. Similarly, Fiorenza, *Justice*, 28 (n. 39) states, "A thorough study of the use of the OT by the author of Revelation is not available."

9 Jay S. Casey, "Exodus Typology in the Book of Revelation" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981); G.K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984); idem, *Revelation*; Loren Brink, *Rethinking Revelation: In the Light of the Old Testament Prophets* (Portland: Northwest, 1986); John Fekkes III, "Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and their Development" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 1988); David E. Aune, *Revelation* (3 vols.; WBC 52A–52C; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997–1998). See also Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 50–51; Fiorenza, *Justice*, 101–103, 135; Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (HDR 9; Missoula: Scholars, 1976; repr., Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 37; Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 515 (n. 54).

to the Old Testament in the 404 verses of Revelation.¹⁰ This approach, however, does not abandon imperial inquiry, but engages the question ‘How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?’ indirectly through its exploration of Old Testament parallels. For example, Revelation 13:1–18 is explained through allusions to Job 40–41 and Daniel 7:1–7. It is argued that the two beasts of Revelation 13 parallel the Leviathan and Behemoth creatures from Job 40–41 that are in opposition to God.¹¹ In addition, the beast from the sea is described in Revelation 13:1–8 with language that parallels the four beasts from the sea in Daniel 7:1–7.¹² These parallels, on some level, govern the interpretative options for the imagery and lead to conclusions that identify Rome as a likely referent for the beast from the sea.¹³

Indeed, this Old Testament analysis has produced valuable results and insights for the study of the Apocalypse, but it has not satisfied all of the imperial inquiries nor adequately addressed the various nuances in Revelation’s imagery. For instance, how do we explain Revelation’s tendency in its imagery to alter certain Old Testament parallels?¹⁴ Or, what do we do when the Old

10 Robert A. Lowery, *Revelation’s Rhapsody* (Joplin, Mo.: College, 2006), 175–197.

11 G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 682; Aune, *Revelation*, 2:728–730; M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1989), 155; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005), 335; Collins, *Combat Myth*, 164; Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John* (BNTC 19; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006), 186–188; Richard Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 1993), 186–192; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation* (AB 38; Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), 210, 217–218; cf. Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John’s Apocalypse* (Boston: Beacon, 1963; repr., Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 49. See also Aune, *Revelation*, 2:728, who admits a level of fragility to this connection.

12 Beale, *Revelation*, 682–687; Aune, *Revelation*, 2:729, 732–737; Boring, *Revelation*, 155; Smalley, *Revelation*, 33–37; Collins, *Combat Myth*, 162; Caird, *Revelation*, 162–163; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 244–247; Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 147–148; Boxall, *Revelation*, 187; Brian K. Blount, *Revelation* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 243, 245–246; Bauckham, *Climax*, 182, 192–193; Ford, *Revelation*, 218–220.

13 Beale, *Revelation*, 684, “In John’s day the beast from the sea would have been identified as Rome.” See also Caird, *Revelation*, 170–73; Charles, *Revelation*, 1:345–367; Boring, *Revelation*, 155. Cf. Smalley, *Revelation*, 336–337, who extends the imagery to “anti-Christian” forces throughout history as well. For more discussion, see chapter 7 below.

14 The Leviathan and Behemoth myth provides a possible connection to the existence of ‘two beasts’ in the imagery of Revelation 13, but it does not explain *why* this element is even necessary. For further discussion, see chapter 7 below.

Testament does *not* parallel certain images in the Apocalypse (e.g., the release of Satan in Rev 20:7–10)? Still further, to show *that* a text refers to Rome does not explain *why* or for *what* purpose the author is referencing the empire. Therefore, while the imagery of the Apocalypse is securely rooted in the Old Testament, the variegated text invites further exploration in other areas—even within the discipline of intertextuality.

In 1976, Adela Yarbro Collins's *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* made a significant contribution to Graeco-Roman intertextual analysis of the Apocalypse. The project's goal was to prove that Revelation has a "definite and coherent structure"¹⁵ to its images and overall account that is "best understood in the framework of the ancient myths of combat."¹⁶ The combat myth is a narrative pattern—found in Jewish, ancient Near East, and Graeco-Roman traditions¹⁷—that "depicts a struggle between two divine beings and their allies for universal kingship. One of the combatants is usually a monster, very often a dragon."¹⁸ In what follows, Collins draws striking parallels between the Leto-Python-Apollo combat myth (popular in western Asia Minor contemporary with Revelation)¹⁹ and the cosmic war in Revelation 12 between the woman, the dragon, and the armies of heaven.²⁰

In conjunction with Old Testament allusions,²¹ Collins suggests that the presence of the combat myth pattern in Revelation positions the text in a familiar narrative of conflict for the Jewish people—this time in reference to Rome.²² Collins concludes:

The combat myth in Revelation thus functions to reinforce resistance to Rome and to inspire willingness for martyrdom. It does this by depicting for the readers the ultimate resolution of the conflict in which they are involved, i.e., their own ultimate salvation and the eventual defeat

¹⁵ Collins, *Combat Myth*, 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 57–58.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 70–71.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 59–61, 67, 70–71. Collins, *Combat Myth*, 59 does point out that this connection between the combat myth and Revelation 12 had been "recognized" by Hermann Gunkel in *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit*, but not in the detail nor for the purposes found in Collins's work.

²¹ Collins, *Combat Myth*, 120.

²² *Ibid.*, 126.

and destruction of their adversaries. Reading or hearing the book of Revelation would provide a proleptic experience of victory.²³

This intertextual exploration, then, develops into another answer to the question: How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?

Similarly, in 1979, John Court's book, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation* uses Graeco-Roman mythologies as intertextual tools to explain the imagery in the Apocalypse. For instance, Court identifies the first horsemen in Revelation 6—who sits on a white horse, holds a bow, receives a crown, and rides out to conquer—as the Graeco-Roman deity Mithras. Court suggests that Mithras satisfies all of the key elements in the depiction of the first horsemen, given that Mithras has white horses that pull its chariot across the sky, bow and arrows, and even “a radiate crown when he is identified with the sun-god.”²⁴ Still further, Court points out that Mithras is called “unconquerable,”²⁵ and thus, as the legions marched out bent on conquest, worship of Mithras occurred at “the manes of their horses.”²⁶ Court then offers this conclusion: “It is reasonable to suppose that in Asia Minor, much nearer to his home, Mithras the god of soldiers and battle, unconquerable as the sun, was already presenting a serious challenge to the much less belligerent religion of Christianity.”²⁷

Like Collins, the Graeco-Roman intertextual exploration of Court moves from interpretative parallels for the images of Revelation to imperial conclusions. In connection with his observations on the four horsemen, Court comments on the fifth seal (Rev 6:9):

But the recognition of an historical reference is only part of the lesson of this vision. The cry of the martyrs is answered in terms which leave no doubt that martyrdom is not only past fact but also present and inevitably future experience . . . It is likely that John saw the threat of much worse to come, and composed this work to meet the threat.²⁸

23 Ibid., 234. For the power of myth, see Collins, *Crisis*, 147–150. For other interactions with Graeco-Roman intertextuality, see: Fiorenza, *Justice*, 135; David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge, 1998), 101–122; Brian K. Blount, *Can I Get a Witness?: Reading Revelation through African American Culture* (Louisville: John Knox, 2005), 61; Caird, *Revelation*, 147–148; Ford, *Revelation*, 195; Boxall, *Revelation*, 176–177; Kovacs and Rowland, *Revelation*, 134–135.

24 John M. Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), 61.

25 Court, *Myth*, 61.

26 Ibid., 62. Quoting Statius, *Theb.* 1.717.

27 Court, *Myth*, 62–63.

28 Ibid., 66–67.

Therefore, intertextual explorations in the book of Revelation (both Old Testament and Graeco-Roman) still address, albeit, at times, indirectly or tangentially, the research question: How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?

Historical Inquiries

In Adolf Deissmann's masterful work *Light from the Ancient East*, he cautions against the use of intertextuality alone to engage the New Testament world, given that "... even if we now possessed the whole of it, [the literature] is after all only a fragment of the ancient world, though an important fragment."²⁹ Furthermore, Deissmann notes that the "literary memorials" do not offer a clear perspective from, or about, the lower classes because the literature we possess "is practically the evidence of the upper, cultivated classes about themselves."³⁰ He insightfully continues, "The lower classes are seldom allowed to speak, and where they do come to the front—in the comedies, for instance—they stand before us for the most part in the light thrown upon them from above."³¹

In order to overcome these limitations, Deissmann invites the scholarly community of his day to move from primarily intertextual explorations to include archaeological discoveries that offer "great indirect value"³² from a "bottom-up perspective."³³ Deissmann's goal was not to supplant intertextuality, but supplement the literary perspective with the archaeological perspective.³⁴ In response to the innovative interpretations of New Testament texts throughout his work,³⁵ Deissmann's project was extended to the book of Revelation.

29 Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (trans. Lionel R.M. Strachan; New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1908; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 3. See also Friesen, *Imperial*, 19.

30 Deissmann, *Light*, 7.

31 *Ibid.*, 7.

32 *Ibid.*, 4, 48.

33 *Ibid.*, 9. His emphasis on the perspective of the lower classes resonates throughout the entire project and, as he suggests (p. 290), could even be linked to his overall thesis. Indeed, his archaeological observations coalesce into a picture of the New Testament Christian community as predominately impoverished, as evidenced by linguistic parallels between the New Testament and common ostracas (pp. 50–55, 60, 62, 145), New Testament references to topics dear to the first century lower classes (pp. 291, 312–313, 313, 328–329), and other evidences. For differing and mediating views, see Kraybill, *Imperial*, 80–83, 86–90; Thompson, *Revelation*, 128–129; Collins, *Crisis*, 88–97.

34 Deissmann, *Light*, 7.

35 *Ibid.*, 319–334.

To be sure, historical connections to the book of Revelation are found in various works over the past 125 years in connection with the Parthians,³⁶ cultic vessels,³⁷ and other imperial elements. In Revelation 13 alone, the beast from the sea (13:1–10) is identified as the Roman Empire,³⁸ the beast from the earth (13:11–15) the Roman imperial cult,³⁹ and the mark of the beast (13:16–18) as an imperial seal on “deeds of sale.”⁴⁰ However, the works of William Ramsay and Colin J. Hemer are unsurpassed in the application of Deissmann’s archaeological emphasis to the Apocalypse.

In 1904, Ramsay published *The Letters to the Seven Churches*,⁴¹ which mined the archaeological sites of the seven churches of Asia Minor for parallels to Revelation 2–3. This work was updated and further advanced by Hemer’s book *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*. Both studies engaged the imagery of Revelation by drawing historical parallels to the people of the text and their socio-historical setting with a cumulative methodology—even if some of the parallels are tenuous.⁴² Hemer admits, “A cumulative case

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- 36 Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 310, 358; Collins, *Combat Myth*, 36; Caird, *Revelation*, 79–80. Cf. Charles, *Revelation*, 1:163; Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 59–60; Mounce, *Revelation*, 142; Boxall, *Revelation*, 108; Blount, *Revelation*, 125; Bauckham, *Climax*, 407; Ford, *Revelation*, 105–106.
- 37 Friesen, *Imperial*, 153; J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), 99.
- 38 Gunkel, *Schöpfung*, 336; Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 358–365; Swete, *Apocalypse*, 161; Charles, *Revelation*, 1:345–367; Caird, *Revelation*, 170–173; Blount, *Revelation*, 246; Boxall, *Revelation*, 187–188; cf. Kovacs and Rowland, *Revelation*, 148–153; Ford, *Revelation*, 218–219.
- 39 Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 365–367; Swete, *Apocalypse*, 168–169; Charles, *Revelation*, 1:357; Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (NTD 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 77, 80–81; Johannes Weiss, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1904), 141; Caird, *Revelation*, 171; Blount, *Revelation*, 257; Boxall, *Revelation*, 194–195.
- 40 Deissmann, *Light*, 341. Cf. Caird, *Revelation*, 172; Mounce, *Revelation*, 260.
- 41 William Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904; repr., Grand Rapids: Hendrickson, 2001).
- 42 For example, regarding the ‘mark of the beast,’ Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (JSNTSup 11; Sheffield: JSOT, 1986; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 127 asserts (without any evidence), “These words seem likely to have referred to an existing problem, and Thyatira was the place where the alliance of a pagan system with the imperial cult was liable to involve the Christian in commercial ruin . . . The [mark of the beast] is suggestive of craftsmen who were branded as apostate by their membership of the guilds. The usage would accord with the use of symbols in contemporary conventions of numismatic representation, the ‘right hand’ standing for their working lives as opposed to their professed status.”

is validated by a sufficiency of evidence; if an excess is offered, and some of it rejected, the basic case is not thereby overthrown.”⁴³

While Ramsay and Hemer provide a treasure trove of possible imperial interactions and historical background for the cities of Revelation, the cumulative methodology, mimicked by some scholars, presents substantial deficiencies for historical inquiry. Specifically, historical connections suffer without discussion of the significance of the parallel; that is, to state *that* there is an historical connection does not explain *why* or for *what* purpose the author is referencing this parallel. For example, G.K. Beale connects the image of “one like a son of man” who holds “seven stars” in his hand (Rev 1:6) to an historical parallel: “Nevertheless, the picture could be a polemic against the imperial myth of an emperor’s son who dies and becomes a divine ruler over the stars of heaven.”⁴⁴ Beyond the possibility of an historical connection, the historical inquiry, however, must extend to questions of significance, like: Why would the author of Revelation choose this image? Was this image significant in Roman imagery or mythology? Is this connection imperially subversive, complicit, or indifferent? Without answers to these questions, the historical connection stagnates as an ‘intriguing possibility.’⁴⁵

43 Hemer, *Letters*, 22.

44 Beale, *Revelation*, 211.

45 Similarly, Craig S. Keener, *Revelation* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 336, in passing, lists historical parallels for the blasphemous names on the beast in Revelation 13:1, “Roman coins in the eastern Mediterranean announced that the emperor was ‘son of God’ and ‘God’; Domitian even demanded the title ‘Lord and God.’” While these historical parallels may in fact explain the imagery in the Apocalypse, merely listing the parallel does not confirm its validity nor extend the inquiry [see also Beale, *Revelation*, 684 for a similar treatment of this imagery in Rev 13:1. Cf. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 240]. Still further, in David Aune’s comments on the mighty angel of Revelation 10, he offers the Colossos of Rhodes as an historical parallel for the imagery of the Apocalypse (Aune, *Revelation*, 2:556). Aune parallels the bronze material of the Colossos to the legs of the mighty angel (Rev 10:1—although, the legs of the angel in Rev 10:1 were not made of bronze but “were like fiery pillars”) and the statue’s “representation of Helios” to the angel’s face that “was like the sun” (10:1). In addition, Aune notes that the mighty angel has his right hand raised (10:5) like the Colossos statue, whose right hand was raised to either hold a torch or “shade his eyes from the sun.” Aune (*Revelation*, 2:556) also suggests the stance of the mighty angel in 10:5 (“standing on the sea and on the land”) could parallel the Colossos, in that the statue stood at the harbor of Rhodes and allowed “ships to pass through its legs” [Ironically, Aune also describes this view of the statue’s position as “erroneous” and points out that “actually it stood on a promontory overlooking the harbor”]. In light of these parallels, Aune (*Revelation*, 2:556–557) concludes, “The many similarities between the description of the angel in 10:1–6 and

At its core, historical inquiry attempts to answer a key question that is rarely vocalized but readily assumed: How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire? The complexity of this question, however, cannot be satisfactorily answered through the cumulative methodology. To show parallels with imperial imagery in the Apocalypse suggests that Revelation *does* interact with the empire, but it does not explain the nature of the interaction. It does not explore the socio-cultural complexities that explain *why* the imperial imagery is used nor *how* the imagery is engaged. In other words, the cumulative methodology shows that interaction between the Apocalypse and the Roman Empire exists, but it stops short of answering the question 'How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?'

Sociological Investigations

In order to address the interaction of the Apocalypse with the empire, a central sociological question must be engaged: What was happening to Christians in the empire at the time of Revelation's composition? More specifically, were the Christians being persecuted by the empire when Revelation was written? As Adela Yarbro Collins warns, "Without a precise knowledge of the book's setting, the interpreter is in danger of serious misunderstanding."⁴⁶

In 1984, Collins published *Crisis & Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* as an attempt to get "behind the text" with "history, sociology, anthropology,

that which is known of the Colossos of Rhodes suggest that the imagery involved was widely known and generally connected with the magnificent Colossos." Aune's conclusion suggests that the imagery in Revelation 10:1–6 proves the widespread knowledge of the Colossos of Rhodes. However, in order for this statue to be a candidate for a parallel to the imagery of Revelation, he must prove the opposite: that the Colossos was widespread and known in the imperial context of the Apocalypse. To this point, Aune (*Revelation*, 2:556) notes the statue was erected in *ca.* 280 BCE by Chares of Lindos and was destroyed by an earthquake in 224 BCE. It "lay in ruins for centuries" until Hadrian repaired it some three hundred years later. At the time of Revelation's composition, then, the Colossos had been in ruins for over two hundred years and would not be repaired for decades more. Therefore, in order for this historical parallel to explain the imagery of Revelation, Aune must explain how the Colossos played a significant role in the imperial context in spite of its ruinous state. He must answer questions like: Why would a statue on the island of Rhodes have been significant to the churches of Asia Minor? Was the statue significant in the reign of the emperor at the time of Revelation's composition? If so, then what imperial propaganda utilizes this Colossos and for what purpose? Still further, why did the Apocalypse use this image instead of others to develop its message?

46 Collins, *Crisis*, 20.

and especially psychology” to develop the elusive setting of Revelation.⁴⁷ Due to four sociological difficulties for first century Christians in Asia Minor—(1) Jewish ostracism; (2) Gentile opposition; (3) Christian compromise; (4) Roman disfavor—Christians were plagued with feelings of fear and powerlessness.⁴⁸ According to Collins, this produced “cognitive dissonance” in the author of Revelation, in that the “social situation as he perceived it” did not correspond to the Christian belief that “the kingdom of God and Christ had been established.”⁴⁹ This cognitive conflict prompted the composition of the Apocalypse, and as a result, the “task of Revelation was to overcome the unbearable tension perceived by the author between what was and what ought to have been.”⁵⁰

Collins concludes that the conflict, however, was not “actual” but only a “perceived crisis.”

The evidence does not support the conclusion that the book of Revelation was written in response to an external crisis due to some recent historical or social change. The Apocalypse was indeed written in response to a crisis, but one that resulted from the clash between the expectations of John and like-minded Christians and the social reality within which they had to live.⁵¹

In other words, the crisis only existed in the perception of John and other perceiving Christians, but it did not exist in imperial practice or sentiment. From this perspective, the Apocalypse, then, has three primary purposes: (1) to reveal the conflict to the unperceiving, (2) to intensify the tension already felt by some, and (3) to provide catharsis for the crisis through the “imaginative event” experienced in the text.⁵²

This conclusion, then, suggests an ‘anti-Roman’ posture of the book of Revelation, in which, on some level, the Apocalypse is ‘picking an imperial fight.’ Collins summarizes the imperial interaction of Revelation:

47 Collins, *Crisis*, 22. See also Adela Yarbro Collins, “Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting,” *Semeia* 36 (1986): 1–12.

48 Collins, *Crisis*, 84–99, 143–144.

49 Ibid., 106. See also Rowland, *Heaven*, 9–11.

50 Collins, *Crisis*, 141.

51 Ibid., 165. See also Candida R. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies, and Traditions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 13.

52 Collins, *Crisis*, 73–74, 141–142, 144, 153–154.

John adapted oral and literary anti-Roman tradition into a particularly fierce and dualistic literary image of the insurmountable opposition between the servants of God and the servants of Rome. He highlighted and emphasized the suffering of Christians at the hands of Rome and painted a picture of the empire which put this trait of persecutor at the very center. In this way he apparently hoped to reinforce whatever hostility to Rome his readers might already have had and to awaken an anti-Roman attitude in those who were neutral or even open to Roman culture.⁵³

Thus, for Collins, the images in Revelation do not reflect the actual historical situation but only the perceived (or even desired) crisis from the Seer's cognitive dissonance, which can only be satisfied with images of Rome's destruction.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, though, concludes that Revelation was a response to actual harassment and persecution.⁵⁴ Through literary criticism, Fiorenza attempts to isolate an "integrating center" that reveals the "historical-social-religious experience" that "generated the particular form-content configuration (*Gestalt*) of Rev."⁵⁵ Thus, the structure (form) and the images (content) reflect the "historical subtext" and invite the readers to reconstruct it.⁵⁶

In agreement with Ernst Käsemann, Fiorenza posits 'power' as the integrating center of apocalyptic ideology;⁵⁷ power, however, must be viewed from the perspective of those who have no power:

Moreover, the answer to the problem will also depend on whose perspective we adopt. One could argue from the perspective of well-to-do white Americans that no harassment, denigration, discrimination, or oppression of blacks existed at the time of Martin Luther King, Jr., although King was assassinated. The perspective and experience of blacks would be quite different.⁵⁸

53 Collins, *Crisis*, 111. See also Blount, *Witness*, ix–x, 87–88.

54 Fiorenza, *Justice*, 8, 187.

55 Ibid., 2.

56 Ibid., 159, 183, 187.

57 Ibid., 4. See also Anatheia E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 4, 7.

58 Fiorenza, *Justice*, 9.

From this point of view, Fiorenza proposes that Revelation is a response to (1) societal injustices⁵⁹ and (2) the imperial cult.⁶⁰ In contradistinction to Collins, Fiorenza argues that the crisis provided by these two elements were not just perceived but were actual afflictions manifested in the “exploitative, destructive, and dehumanizing” power of Rome that resulted in “poverty, banishment, violence, harassment, and assassination.”⁶¹ In this context, Revelation does not offer a psychological escape,⁶² but an opportunity to participate in imperial opposition through the “mytho-poetic” imagery.⁶³ The “evocative power” of Revelation’s imagery, then, is to “motivate and encourage Christians” in their “confrontation with Rome’s power and cult.”⁶⁴

In 1990, Leonard Thompson joined the sociological investigation of the Apocalypse with his work, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*. Thompson’s reconstruction of the social setting adapts the works of Walter Schmithals⁶⁵ and Adela Yarbro Collins.⁶⁶ Schmithals’s work allows Thompson to posit that apocalypses are “not caused by social, historical forces” but are intrinsically self-referential.⁶⁷ In contrast to Fiorenza, Schmithals urges the scholar to sever “connections between apocalyptic and social settings,” which suggests that the actual historical context is not reflected in the apocalyptic text at all.⁶⁸

In agreement with Collins, Thompson suggests that Revelation is a record of a ‘perceived crisis.’ The synthesis of Schmithals and Collins is evident in Thompson’s summary:

[Perceived Crisis] is a way of saying that (1) the author of an apocalypse considers a situation to be a crisis but (2) that the crisis dimensions of the situation are evident only through his angle of vision . . . that is, the crisis becomes visible only through the revealed knowledge in an apocalypse; prior to that knowledge there is no crisis. . . . Thus, the concept ‘perceived

59 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 126–127.

60 Fiorenza, *Justice*, 6, 193.

61 Ibid., 8.

62 Fiorenza, *Vision*, 29–31. Fiorenza, *Justice*, 8.

63 Fiorenza, *Justice*, 187–189.

64 Ibid., 187, 188.

65 Walter Schmithals, *The Apocalyptic Movement* (New York: Abingdon, 1975). See Thompson, *Revelation*, 27.

66 Collins, *Crisis & Catharsis*.

67 Thompson, *Revelation*, 27.

68 Ibid., 27.

crisis' contributes to our understanding of how an apocalypse functions *in* a social situation; but it sheds no light on the social occasion *of* an apocalypse, for any social situation can be perceived as one of crisis.⁶⁹

Since the Apocalypse only offers the writer's 'perceived crisis' and does not reflect the actual historical context, the socio-historical setting must be approached from documents and evidence outside of Revelation.

So, Thompson turns his attention to the conventional depiction of the emperor Domitian: a mad tyrant who creates crisis for the entire Roman world (Christians included).⁷⁰ His analysis of the evidence suggests that an "official portrait of Domitian was drawn a few years after his death by a circle of writers around Pliny the Younger that included Tacitus and Suetonius."⁷¹ This "circle of writers" intentionally malign the reign of Domitian (for Trajanic propaganda purposes) and "distort virtually every area of Domitian's public and state activity during the time of his emperorship."⁷² Thus, Thompson concludes that our socio-historical suppositions about Christians at the end of the first-century suffer from effective anti-Domitian propaganda:

The empire—especially under Domitian—was beneficial to rich and poor provincials; and there were checks against extensive abuse of the poorer provincials by the richer ones. There is little evidence to suggest fundamental conflicts either within the economic structure of the province or between the province and Rome. The writer of the Book of Revelation may urge his readers to see conflicts in their urban setting and to think of Roman society as 'the enemy,' but those conflicts do not reside in Asian social structures. The urban setting in which Christians worshipped and lived was stable and beneficial to all who participated in its social and economic institutions.⁷³

69 Ibid., 28.

70 Thompson, *Revelation*, 13–15 establishes the date of Revelation to Domitian's reign, and pp. 15–17 summarizes the 'Evil Domitian' depiction.

71 Thompson, *Revelation*, 96.

72 Ibid., 101. For a critical discussion on this conclusion, see chapter 5 below.

73 Thompson, *Revelation*, 166–167.

In fact, Thompson emphatically states that Christians did not experience persecution at all; instead the historical evidence suggests that “Christians lived quiet lives, not much different from other provincials.”⁷⁴

By extension, Thompson suggests that the conflict in the book of Revelation was a fabrication of the author, who was not even banished to the island of Patmos but went there on his own accord.⁷⁵ Using Peter Berger’s insights on ‘cognitive minority,’ Thompson characterizes Revelation as “negative and hostile expressions toward the majority” due to the empire’s “refusal to believe” the Christian reconstruction of “what the world is really like.”⁷⁶ Consequently, the Apocalypse intends to provoke his audience to anti-Roman actions. As Thompson asserts, “In John’s world, Christians should seek out clashes with the state . . . Here John is unambiguous. Within his vision of reality, he and all those who wear the white garments are pitted against the evil empire.”⁷⁷

Sociological investigations into the book of Revelation engage the world that rests just beyond the text itself. The works of Adela Yarbro Collins, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Leonard Thompson significantly advance this study in Revelation—as is evidenced by the subsequent projects that incorporate and build upon their work.⁷⁸ Indeed, their works compel future projects to address an important issue in imperial inquiry: persecution of Christians. Thus, by asking ‘What was happening to Christians in the empire at the time of

74 Ibid., 95.

75 Ibid., 172–173. See also Thompson, *Revelation*, 173 for his dismissal of the death of Antipas in Rev 2:13. In fact, Thompson suggests that *all* language of crisis is merely an expression of the apocalyptic genre and not a reflection of the socio-historical setting (p. 30). He states, “There is a crisis orientation in the Book of Revelation, but it is a characteristic of the genre, not of political circumstances occasioning the genre; that is, the formulation of ‘crisis situations’ is a topos, a commonplace topic, in the genre ‘apocalypse (p. 175).’” However, Thompson concedes on p. 198, “Some [apocalypses]—for example, the Book of Daniel—may be the product of crisis in the political history of Judaism.”

76 Thompson, *Revelation*, 193–194.

77 Ibid., 191–192.

78 Christopher Rowland, *Revelation* (London: Epworth, 1993); John E. Hurtgen, *Anti-Language in the Apocalypse of John* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen Biblical, 1993); Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2003); Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000); Mounce, *Revelation*; Boxall, *Revelation*; Thomas Söding, “Heilig, heilig, heilig: Zur politischen Theologie der Johannes-Apokalypse,” *ZTK* 96.1 (1999): 49–76.

Revelation's composition?' the sociological investigation indirectly engages a larger question: How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?

The Emergence of Focused Imperial Inquiry: Revelation Research in the Past 25 Years

In the past 25 years, Revelation research has combined intertextual explorations, historical inquiries, and sociological investigations to focus concerted attention on answering the question: How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire? In 1985, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza exhorted Revelation scholars to direct attention to this question through the socio-historical entry point of the imperial cult.⁷⁹ While the imperial cult has been recognized over the past 125 years as a key point of interaction with the New Testament,⁸⁰ the recent works of J. Nelson Kraybill and Steven J. Friesen are the most comprehensive applications of emperor worship to the book of Revelation.

J. Nelson Kraybill's monograph *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* was published in 1996. With intertextual contours,⁸¹ Kraybill's study begins with the question, "Why does John on Patmos, in a book written for Christians living under Roman rule, turn his attention to merchants, shipmasters and sailors at the climactic moment of Babylon's (Rome's) demise?"⁸² Throughout the project, Kraybill argues that the economic benefit found in the patron/client relationships embedded in the imperial cult presented a unique temptation for the Christians of Asia Minor to take part in the Roman economic system. Kraybill writes:

John of Patmos had the perception to see that Rome's political and economic grandeur was attractive to some followers of Jesus . . . In light of this belief, Revelation 18 is more than a poem about the fall of a foe; it is a

79 Fiorenza, *Justice*, 19. See also Rowland, *Heaven*, 411; Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 119–122.

80 Deissmann, *Light*, 252–254, 290, 355–356, 363–373; Collins, *Crisis*, 73. For a list of other authors, see: Deissmann, *Light*, 338 (n. 2) and Fiorenza, *Justice*, 30 (n. 63).

81 Kraybill, *Imperial*, 21–22. See also Kraybill, *Imperial*, 150, 214.

82 Kraybill, *Imperial*, 15. Kraybill notes on p. 22 that this question simply rephrases Richard Bauckham's inquiry: "Why then does John give us the perspective of Rome's collaborators in evil: the ruling classes, the mercantile magnates, the shipping industry?"

clarion call for Christians to sever all economic and political ties with an Empire that had sold out to injustice, idolatry and greed.⁸³

The imperative to “come out of her” (Rev 18:4), according to Kraybill, was not because “commerce and trade . . . were intrinsically evil,”⁸⁴ but because of the economic interweaving of the Roman market and emperor worship. He states that John “warned Christians to sever or to avoid economic and political ties with Rome because institutions and structures of the Roman Empire were saturated with unholy allegiance to an Emperor who claimed to be divine (or was treated as such).”⁸⁵ In fact, Kraybill concludes that the imperial cult permeated Roman economics so thoroughly that “it was difficult to buy or sell without the mark of the beast (13:17).”⁸⁶

Although Revelation 18 is the primary text in Kraybill’s analysis, the intention is for his insights into the imperial cult’s involvement in the socio-economic world of the Apocalypse to be used “for understanding the overall message of the book,”⁸⁷ that is, “John’s attitude toward Rome and his reasons for rejecting economic involvement with her.”⁸⁸ In other words, Kraybill uses the imperial cult as an entry point to answer the question, ‘How does John interact with the Roman Empire?’

With similar trajectories, Steven J. Friesen’s work *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, published in 2001, begins with a broad analysis of the imperial cult’s development in Asia Minor from the first century BCE to the end of the first century CE before he applies his observations to four thematic categories derived from phenomenological historical methodologies: [1] cosmogony; [2] cosmology; [3] human maturation; and [4] eschatology.⁸⁹ As a result, Friesen’s work advances Kraybill’s insights in that Friesen does not limit his imperial cult analysis to commerce nor his application to one text

83 Kraybill, *Imperial*, 16. So also, Kraybill, *Imperial*, 100–101, “...there is reason to believe some Christians in the seven churches were trying their best to become ‘insiders.’” Cf. Kraybill, *Imperial*, 196.

84 Ibid., 17.

85 Ibid., 17 [his *emphasis*].

86 Kraybill, *Apocalypse*, 149. See also Kraybill, *Imperial*, 197–198.

87 Kraybill, *Imperial*, 23.

88 Ibid., 149.

89 Friesen, *Imperial*, 4. Friesen’s 2001 project is the fruit of his published Harvard University doctoral dissertation, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia & the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (Leiden: Brill, 1993). Friesen foreshadowed the 2001 project in Friesen, *Neokoros*, 165 (n. 68), “The issue of the relationship of imperial cults to Rev is too complicated to be addressed in this context. It is a question to which I hope to return in a separate study.”

in Revelation. Specifically, Friesen isolates a cosmological “collision course” between the imperial cult and the Apocalypse, given that in Roman society “space was centered on Rome and time was organized around Augustus and the accomplishments of the empire.”⁹⁰ The imperial cult, then, is a religious expression of the order of the world, which, as Friesen points out, “can be used in the service of hegemony as well as in support of resistance.”⁹¹ Thus, it is in this religious context that the book of Revelation offers a “resistance religion” from the perspective of the “subjugated people.”⁹²

Initially, Friesen develops this imperial interaction with the Apocalypse by analyzing the establishment of provincial imperial cult temples. In 29 BCE, Pergamum was the first city approved to construct an imperial cult temple in honor of Rome and Augustus.⁹³ About fifty years later, Smyrna’s request for a temple in honor of Tiberius, Livia, and the Senate was granted, which symbolized Tiberius’ allegiance to “Roman corporate authority” and his key “dynastic connection to Augustus” through Augustus’ widow Livia.⁹⁴

In the city of Miletus in *ca.* 40 CE, Caligula attempted a unique modification to the imperial cult.⁹⁵ First, unlike the previous two provincial imperial cults, Caligula was the catalyst for the temple cult in Miletus and *not* the city itself.⁹⁶ Second, this temple was to be dedicated to Caligula only and not to “any other

90 Friesen, *Imperial*, 4. See also Thompson, *Revelation*, 5, 33 and Collins, *Combat Myth*, 117. For cosmology in apocalyptic literature, see Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 27, 185–210, 217.

91 Friesen, *Imperial*, 11.

92 Ibid., 14. See also Laura Salah Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture: The Second-Century Church Amid the Spaces of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 9–10.

93 Friesen, *Neokoros*, 7–15; Friesen, *Imperial*, 27. Friesen, *Imperial*, 29 recounts the difficult political navigation that Octavian faced with the request to build this temple in Pergamum in his honor: “If Octavian approved the request, the Senate might use it against him as a sign of his desire for absolute rule. If Octavian refused cultic honors for himself, he could anticipate the continuation and probable proliferation of cults for Roman officials and would thus assist possible usurpers. By approving a cult for himself, Octavian began the process by which all ruler cults in Asia focused on the emperor and the imperial family. After his reign, no new cults of Roman officials were founded and cults of emperors spread.” Although shrewdly handled with the addition of Rome in the cult (see Friesen, *Neokoros*, 58 for further discussion), this account shows the political tumult that imperial cult temples could have for emperors.

94 Friesen, *Imperial*, 38. See also Friesen, *Neokoros*, 15–21.

95 For this date, see Friesen, *Neokoros*, 24. Friesen’s work corrects the erroneous attribution of an imperial cult temple under Caligula in Ephesus (cf. Thompson, *Revelation*, 173).

96 Friesen, *Neokoros*, 24 and Friesen, *Imperial*, 39–40 points to Dio Cass. 59.28.1 as evidence.

individual or collective (e.g., Rome, Livia, the Senate).⁹⁷ Upon his death in 41 CE, however, the brash project was promptly abandoned.⁹⁸ The next provincial imperial cult temple was constructed in 89/90 CE in the city of Ephesus.⁹⁹ Although established under Domitian, Friesen argues that epigraphic evidence reveals “that the provincial cult of the Sebastoi in Ephesus was a cult for the emperors of the Flavian family, and perhaps included Domitia.”¹⁰⁰

This survey of the provincial temples leads Friesen to the conclusion that the imperial cult attempted to define “relationships between the imperial center and the peripheral areas” and that its message “particularly dealt with cosmology.”¹⁰¹ Specifically, Friesen writes:

In these and other ways, provincial cults created, maintained, and refined meaningful order in the world. Although there were other functions of these institutions, the provincial temples served as crucial symbols of the cosmology that supported imperial rule, that defined the evolving identity of the province, and that promoted provincial obedience at various levels of society.¹⁰²

In what follows, Friesen articulates the cosmological claims of the book of Revelation as a response to the imperial cult.

97 Friesen, *Neokoros*, 22.

98 Friesen, *Imperial*, 40–41. See also Friesen, *Neokoros*, 21–26. Kraybill, *Imperial*, 61 inaccurately concludes, “Miletus established a third provincial cult during the reign of Caligula.”

99 Friesen, *Imperial*, 43–52. Friesen, *Neokoros*, 29–75 emphatically describes the significance of this temple for the city of Ephesus. Previously, cities were not considered for an imperial cult temple if they already had a prominent cultic temple for another deity or emperor. Given that Ephesus already was the center of worship for Artemis (so Acts 19:23–41), the addition of this provincial imperial cult temple elevated the status of the city, which now boasts the unique title of ‘twice neokoros.’

100 Friesen, *Neokoros*, 36. Significantly, Friesen concludes that ‘Domitian’s temple’ in Ephesus is more appropriately labeled the ‘temple of the Sebastoi’ (*Neokoros*, 35–38), and, in addition, the evidence does not support any “extraordinary cultic honors for Domitian” (Friesen, *Neokoros*, 34, 40, 165–166; see also Friesen, *Imperial*, 149; cf. Kraybill, *Imperial*, 29).

101 Friesen, *Imperial*, 53–54.

102 Ibid., 55. At this point in the book, Friesen traces municipal imperial cults and the overall pervasiveness of the imperial cult into various aspects of society. To summarize, Friesen, *Imperial*, 120 exclaims, “Choir practices, esoteric rituals, mourning, remembrance of ancestors, the passing of winter, women’s rituals, the agricultural cycles, the socialization of sons, household worship—all these were touched by imperial cults in group settings.”

After an analysis of Revelation's date (locating the text in space and time),¹⁰³ Friesen mines the cosmological themes in the book of Revelation (locating space and time in the text).¹⁰⁴ This study concludes with a contrapuntal articulation of Revelation's cosmology:

[John] tried to disabuse his audience of the notion that Jerusalem, Rome, or any earthly city could function as the geographic center of reality. He instead looked upward, defining God's throne as the meaningful center that infuses all other space with meaning. Similarly, the most important type of time in John's text was not dictated by the actions of the emperors; it was instead the time experienced in true worship. During worship one learned the true meaning of all other times and experienced some of them to some degree.¹⁰⁵

From this cosmological observation, Friesen comes to an anti-Roman conclusion for the book of Revelation, "John was primarily concerned to present

103 Friesen, *Imperial*, 135–151. Although he lands on a Domitianic date (pp. 140, 143, 151), he peculiarly states that his "structural comparison does not require us to choose a particular date within the decades when Revelation was surely written. . . . Although I conclude that Revelation was probably written in the late first century, the following analysis is general enough to be applicable whether one is persuaded that Revelation was written in 69 or 96 CE." See pp. 68–70 below for a discussion of the importance of Revelation's composition date for imperial inquiry.

104 Friesen, *Imperial*, 152–166.

105 Ibid., 165. Chapter 10 (pp. 167–179) builds upon the cosmological emphasis by examining the function of 'myth' in communities and in Revelation. Although Friesen, *Imperial*, 4 states four thematic categories, cosmology is the primary focus of Friesen's work. While eschatology is sporadically (and at times implicitly) engaged throughout, it is usually in conjunction with a cosmological point. For example, Friesen, *Imperial*, 165–166 states, "Rather than settling for the flawed eschatology of imperial cults in which one prays for the eternal reign of the Roman emperor, John chose a thorough eschatology that held strictly to the integrity of absolute being and demanded the eventual demise of all symbols. This entailed a rejection of the powerful and relatively stable cosmology of his social setting. He fashioned instead a more dangerous definition of reality, with space and time organized around the absent throne of God while the churches waited for an unfilled future on a not-yet-created earth. In this way the present was portrayed as paradox, not as wholeness." Human maturation is first dealt with on p. 185, while cosmogony is not addressed until p. 197, and his conclusion is, "As in contemporary imperial cults, so in Revelation there was relatively little interest in reopening the accepted cosmogonic narratives to introduce new characters. . . . cosmogony and the role of the Christ in those events are not primary issues in Revelation."

before the churches the character of his opposition to empire. His opposition was religious: Rome had claimed a status that belonged only to God.”¹⁰⁶ The application, however, is not limited to Rome alone—for Friesen extends the opposition to state that “John was not simply anti-Roman; he was anti-empire.”¹⁰⁷

Building on the Past: Four Observations on Revelation Research

The approaches and projects over the past 125 years in Revelation scholarship have, to varying degrees, engaged the question ‘How does the book of Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?’ Through intertextual explorations (both Old Testament and Graeco-Roman), historical inquiries, and sociological investigations of the Apocalypse, scholars intermittently addressed imperial interaction. These advances paved the way for the insightful works of J. Nelson Kraybill and Steven J. Friesen. Four observations from this history of research summarize where we have been and suggest where we should go from here in order to answer more adequately the stated research question.

Observation #1: The Perspective of the Oppressed

Conclusions about imperial interaction must not be divorced from the perspective of the oppressed. Questions about Revelation’s occasion, purpose, imagery, application, and audience are all significantly impacted if the evidence is analyzed from the perspective of the imperial elite instead of the non-elite. To suggest, then, that the socio-historical setting of Revelation was “stable and beneficial to all” oversimplifies the complexities of oppression and resistance and, in addition, simply ignores the dissident voices of the subjugated.¹⁰⁸ As a result, this monograph incorporates recent studies from ‘Postcolonial Criticism’ and ‘Examinations of Dominance’ as indispensable influences on imperial inquiries into the New Testament text.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Friesen, *Imperial*, 208. See also *ibid.*, 211.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 4. The quote continues with: “The visionary argument built a broader case, one that questions every imperialist project. John’s apocalyptic imagery depicted Rome in ruins and would lay waste to the structures of modern hegemony as well.”

¹⁰⁸ Thompson, *Revelation*, 167. In response to Thompson’s reconstruction of the socio-historical context in which Domitian is portrayed as a benevolent emperor to both rich and poor, Christian and non-Christian, Fiorenza, *Justice*, 8 writes, “This may be the case from the perspective of official Roman historiography, but it is not borne out by the experience articulated in Rev. and other NT writings.”

¹⁰⁹ Friesen, *Imperial*, 4 recognizes the value of these studies for his own work as well, stating, “I adopt a postcolonial strategy—contrapuntal interpretation of dominant and

Observation #2: The Presence of Persecution (or lack thereof)

Persecution is a central issue for Revelation studies. Not only does the presence of persecution (or lack thereof) guide questions about how or why certain images appear in Revelation, but it also directly impacts the question ‘How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?’ As Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza suggests, if the evidence is viewed from the perspective of the oppressed, then what constitutes as persecution and how the term is even defined significantly alters.¹¹⁰

From this vantage point, a subject’s ‘perceived crisis’ does not necessitate a fabrication of conflict, but instead an actual crisis may exist—even if the imperial documents suggest otherwise. The only way to determine if the socio-historical context was one of impending crisis, no crisis, or rampant persecution is to view the imperial evidence of that time period from the perspective of the dominated—the subjects of the empire. Thus, this monograph establishes a date of composition for the book of Revelation¹¹¹ in order to examine the imperial evidence of persecution (or lack thereof) from a subjugated point of view.¹¹²

resistant histories—to keep from ignoring marginal voices.” Nevertheless, Friesen only briefly interacts with Edward Said’s work *Culture and Imperialism* (p. 17—not engaging more recent works by Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, R.S. Sugirtharajah, Stephen Moore, and Fernando Segovia) and just takes the “postcolonial point” that there is a dominant aspect to the world in which things like religion are used as weapons against their subjects (p. 17). Friesen does not engage ‘Examinations of Dominance’ (e.g., James C. Scott) nor other works of Empire Studies in the New Testament (e.g., Richard Horsley, Warren Carter, etc.). See chapters 1 and 2 below for a full discussion of Empire Studies, ‘Postcolonial Criticism,’ and ‘Examinations of Dominance.’

110 Fiorenza, *Justice*, 9. Fiorenza, *Justice*, 19–20 emphasizes the importance of persecution for imperial inquiry noting, “One of the main points of contention in evaluating the relationship of Rev. to the Roman Empire continues to revolve around the question of whether a persecution of Christians took place under Domitian.” Conversely, Friesen, *Imperial*, 145 states, “There is no need to posit persecution or a widespread crisis in society to explain the hostility of Revelation toward Roman rule” (see also Rowland, *Heaven*, 408). Although Friesen does acknowledge two lines later, “Even if our evidence suggests that the overall situation was stable, we should not conclude that all the inhabitants were satisfied. Imperial authority always meets forms of resistance, because the encompassing claims of imperial authority cannot match the diversity of actual experiences and because imperial authority never legitimates the experiences of its victims.”

111 See chapter 4 below.

112 See chapter 5 below.

Observation #3: The Reconstruction of the Socio-Historical Context

In the reconstruction of the socio-historical context of Revelation, Leonard Thompson's recommendation that the primary source should not be the emotively charged Apocalypse is to be commended.¹¹³ Indeed, the documents and evidence outside of Revelation provide a larger sample of informative sources with a greater breadth of perspective. Yet, it is an overstatement to suggest that the Apocalypse is completely severed from the social setting in which it was composed.¹¹⁴ The works of Kraybill and Friesen display the value of combining both the imperial evidence in the Roman world and the images and themes found in the book of Revelation in order to reconstruct the socio-historical milieu. Therefore, this monograph engages the socio-historical setting through numismatics, inscriptions, Graeco-Roman intertextuality, architecture, and other 'non-Christian sources'¹¹⁵ in juxtaposition to the imperial interactions evident in the text of the Apocalypse itself.¹¹⁶

Observation #4: The Limitation of the Imperial Cult

The imperial cult as the socio-historical entry point to answer the question 'How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?' has been expressed by a wide variety of authors and has produced significant contributions to the conversation.¹¹⁷ Friesen heralds, "In John's view, the encounter with imperial cults was the most urgent."¹¹⁸ Likewise, Kraybill describes emperor worship as "deeply offensive to John"¹¹⁹ and even suggests "that John thought some soon would die for refusing to participate (20:4; cf. 6.9–11)."¹²⁰ The evidence,

113 See pp. 135–139 below.

114 Fiorenza, *Justice*, 137.

115 See chapters 3 and 5 below.

116 See chapters 6 and 7 below.

117 Fiorenza, *Justice*, 91 suggests that John "focused [Revelation] against Domitian and the imperial cult" (see also Fiorenza, *Justice*, 24–25, 188, 193–194). Even Collins, *Crisis*, 73 states, "A more plausible view of [Revelation's] function is that it was written to awaken and intensify Christian exclusiveness, particularly vis-à-vis the imperial cult." See also Simon R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984; repr. 2002), 196–198; Wengst, *Pax*, 118–135; G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 217; Charles, *Revelation*, 1:351.

118 Friesen, *Imperial*, 193.

119 Kraybill, *Imperial*, 17.

120 Ibid., 26–27. Elsewhere, Kraybill, *Apocalypse*, 15 writes, "The pressing issue for John's readers was how Christians, who gave their highest loyalty to Jesus, should conduct themselves in a world where economic and political structures assumed that everyone would worship the emperor."

however, suggests that while the imperial cult is significant, the self-understanding of Rome is much larger than emperor worship.

For example, Friesen's description of the temple of the Sebastoi in Ephesus includes the identification of two eastern deities (Attis and Isis) from the original façade that contained possibly 35–40 other “gods and goddesses from east and west.”¹²¹ The presence of these deities lining the provincial imperial cult temple suggests, according to Friesen, that “the emperors joined the ranks of the divine and played their own particular role in that realm.”¹²² In other words, the emperor and his cult play a part in the overall story, but the story is still much larger than the imperial cult itself.

Similarly, Friesen infers that the mythic depiction on the altar of Augustus in Miletos indicates “the worship of Augustus was located within local myths,”¹²³ which parallels his more broad conclusion, “The practice of joint worship—incorporating imperial worship into the cult of another deity—was widespread.”¹²⁴ Even Simon R. F. Price concludes, “[The emperors'] statues did not rival or displace those of the traditional deities.”¹²⁵ The imperial cult, then, plays a significant role in the narrative of Rome, but emperor worship is dependent on the traditional Graeco-Roman gods and not the opposite.¹²⁶ Friesen summarizes:

The result is not a homogenous abstraction, but a reconstruction of imperial cults as one aspect of an evolving polytheistic system. Imperial

¹²¹ Friesen, *Neokoros*, 72–73.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 75.

¹²³ Friesen, *Imperial*, 71–72. See also *ibid.*, 85–86 for a description of the imperial cult integration into Roman mythology in the statues in the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias.

¹²⁴ Friesen, *Imperial*, 75.

¹²⁵ Price, *Rituals*, 147. Price, *Rituals*, 232 also states, “As we have seen, when the emperor shared a sanctuary with a traditional god, he was carefully subordinated to that deity in various ways.” Friesen, *Neokoros*, 74 forcefully critiques Price's emphasis on the subordination of the emperor to the other gods: “Why would statues of the emperors be depicted so much larger than the gods? . . . The placement of the emperor in any given precinct should not be understood as a statement about the general status of emperors and gods. . . . The question is not so much divine ontology as hospitality and protocol.” Regardless of the points of exaltation or subordination, both Friesen and Price describe the emperors as ‘joining’ the gods and not supplanting them—that is, the imperial cult contributes to a message and socio-historical tableau much larger than emperor worship alone.

¹²⁶ Kraybill, *Imperial*, 54 even suggests that “The refusal of any group to participate in traditional Graeco-Roman religion appeared to threaten the stability of the Empire, since impiety could provoke disfavor from the gods. . . . The very fabric of society depended on continued devotion to the traditional gods.” See also Friesen, *Neokoros*, 151–152.

cults did not compose an independent, mythic worldview; they were a distinguishable part of their broader, polytheistic cultural context. As such, they did not need to shoulder the whole burden for the religious life of the communities in which they were practiced. Rather, the worship of the imperial families and institutions constituted an identifiable feature of the larger symbolic world of Greco-Roman polytheism.¹²⁷

In light of this evidence, the imperial cult emerges as a helpful but limited tool for imperial inquiry in Revelation. For instance, emperor worship greatly illuminates the imagery in Revelation 13:11–18,¹²⁸ but as Friesen observes, “it is safe to conclude that references to imperial cults within the text of Revelation come only in the last half of the book, specifically in chapters 13–19.”¹²⁹ Asking the question, then, ‘How does Revelation interact with the *imperial cult*?’ does not satisfy all of the imagery and contours of Revelation’s message. In fact, certain passages, such as Revelation 20:7–10, are marginalized at best or completely ignored at worst.¹³⁰ In other words, if the inquiries into the parallels between the book of Revelation and the Roman world are limited to the imperial cult alone, then we only receive a small portion of the overall picture of the Roman world and the Apocalypse.

Thus, this monograph examines the broader Roman context, in which the imperial cult participates as one part, to engage other prominent facets of Roman propaganda.¹³¹ A more comprehensive perspective of the Roman message offers a reservoir of imperial referents for the imagery of the Apocalypse that can illuminate texts both inside and outside of Revelation 13–19. So, the imperial investigation is restated in its broader form: ‘How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?’ In view of the greater Roman world, this approach appreciates the specificity of Kraybill and Friesen’s work, while

127 Friesen, *Imperial*, 122. See also *ibid.*, 19, 116, 147; Deissmann, *Light*, 343. Cf. Thompson, *Revelation*, 131, 162–164.

128 Thompson, *Revelation*, 164.

129 Even though David E. Aune, “The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John,” *BR* 18 (1983): 5–26 argues for imperial cult influences on Rev 4–6, Friesen rejects Aune’s parallels [see Friesen, *Imperial*, 248 (n. 68); 251 (n. 12)].

130 Rev 20:7–10 is completely ignored in Collins, *Crisis*, 150, although she mentions it once in Collins, *Combat Myth*, 225–226, in which it is categorized as an instance of “Combat-Victory” without further discussion. In Friesen, *Imperial*, 159–161, 188 and Kraybill, *Apocalypse*, 165, the events in Revelation 20:7–10 are retold without any additional commentary.

131 See chapter 3 below.

extending the imperial inquiry into areas of Revelation largely ignored¹³² or in need of re-examination.¹³³

The Alter-Imperial Paradigm: Empire Studies and the Book of Revelation

Building on the past 125 years of Revelation research, this monograph constructs the Alter-Imperial paradigm in order to directly address the stated research question.¹³⁴ In what follows, the theoretical background of the imperial inquiry is repositioned around the biblical scholarship of Empire Studies, which applies insights from ‘Postcolonial Criticism’ and ‘Examinations of Dominance’ to its historical analysis in order to view the text from the perspective of the oppressed (chapter 1). After examining weaknesses of Empire Studies (chapter 2), the Alter-Imperial paradigm begins by investigating the imperial propaganda in the broader Roman world (chapter 3). Then, the date of Revelation’s composition (chapter 4) is used to isolate the socio-historical analysis to the Flavian dynasty and address the question of persecution (chapter 5).

The reorganization of the theoretical background offers a fresh vantage point with which to view the imagery of the Apocalypse, especially in anomalous texts. Specifically, the Alter-Imperial paradigm is applied to the enigmatic text in Revelation 20:7–10 which depicts the release of Satan (chapter 6).¹³⁵ Through parallels to Roman triumphal processions, Revelation 20:7–10—largely neglected in intertextual explorations, historical inquiries, and sociological investigations—reveals that the chief enemy for Christians in Asia Minor is Satan, the bound enemy leader marching in God’s triumphal procession, and not Rome.

This interpretation of Revelation 20:7–10 allows us to approach the research question with greater poignancy (chapter 7). Perhaps paradoxically, the

132 See chapter 6 below.

133 See chapter 7 below.

134 For the particular nuances of the term ‘paradigm’ (e.g., purpose, measures of success, etc.), see Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (4d ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

135 On the peculiar nature of Rev 20:7–10, Friesen, *Imperial*, 177 comments, “This is one of many surprises at the end of John’s narrative. Some of John’s contemporary writers expected a messianic age at the end of history and before the resurrection, but none of the texts known to us has a second battle after that age.”

Alter-Imperial paradigm suggests that to reduce Revelation to an anti-Roman document is to embrace the Satanic deception that the empire is the chief enemy in the war against God's people. This misguided elevation of Rome's significance is corrected in the imagery and message of the Apocalypse, because to target Rome alone is to miss the true target. Indeed, in Revelation, Rome's destruction does not end the story any more than Babylon's defeat ended the Jewish exile. Rome is another prostitute in a long line of adulterous empires used by Satan in the war against God's kingdom. To claim true victory, then, Christians in Asia Minor must direct their attention to the construction of the Alter-Empire by redirecting their attention to the true enemy—Satan. Thus, the Alter-Imperial paradigm both encourages and tempers our exploration of the question: 'How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?'

PART 1

The Emergence of the Alter-Imperial Paradigm



The Origins of Empire Studies

Q. Are not servants bound to obey their masters? A. Yes, the Bible exhorts servants to be obedient to their masters, and to please them well in all things... Q. If the master is unreasonable, may the servant disobey? A. No, the Bible says, 'Servants, be subject to your masters in all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward...' Q. *If servants suffer unjustly, what are they to do?* A. *They must bear it patiently.*¹

Over the past several decades, technological advances in communication and transportation reduced the size of the world and enhanced cross-cultural dialogue. This produced significant shifts in a variety of academic disciplines. Perhaps most notably, the voices of the marginalized became more audible in scholarship as a whole.² Observations regarding dominance and oppression caused scholars to examine texts not just from the perspective of the dominant, but from the perspective of the dominated—impacting sociology,³ literature,⁴ history,⁵ politics,⁶ general religious studies,⁷ and others.

- 1 Gilbert Osofsky, ed., *Puttin' on Ole Massa: The Slave Narratives of Henry Bibb, William Wells, and Solomon Northrup* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1969), 32–33 [*emphasis added*]. This quote comes from a catechism for slaves in the antebellum south of the United States. The last line is derived from Rev 13:10; 14:12 (cf. 1:9).
- 2 Richard A. Horsley, "Rejoinder: Thoughts from the Belly of the Beast," *JAAR* 71.1 (2003): 130; Susan M. (Elli) Elliott, "Reflections on 'New Testament and Roman Empire,'" *USQR* 59.3–4 (2005): 172–173.
- 3 John H. Kautsky, *The Politics of Aristocratic Empires* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Gerhard Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).
- 4 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Random House, 1993).
- 5 Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492–Present* (New York: HarperCollins, 1980); H.E. Chehabi, ed., *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).
- 6 Arif Dirlik, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism," *Cinq* 20 (1994): 328–356; H.E. Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism: The Liberation Movement of Iran Under the Shah and Khomeini* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook, "After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in the Third World," *CSSH* 34 (1992): 141–167; H.E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz, eds., *Sultanistic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
- 7 David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996); Lionel M. Jenson, *Manufacturing*

In biblical studies, this ‘bottom up’ perspective surfaced in the early 20th century with authors like Adolf Deissmann.⁸ It gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s with the trend of focusing textual inquiries on the ‘people’ of the texts instead of the ‘ideas.’⁹ This subtle shift led to interdisciplinary projects that facilitated more voices at the proverbial ‘interpretative table,’ such as: sociology and anthropology,¹⁰ feminist studies,¹¹ African-American

Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and the Mystic East* (London: Routledge, 1999); Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

- 8 Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (trans. Lionel R.M. Strachan; New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1908; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978).
- 9 Specifically, Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Politics* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2000), 1–16 references Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 4, 28, “To me the climax of Romans is actually chapters 9–11, i.e., his reflections on the relation between . . . the church and the Jewish *people*—not ‘Christianity’ and ‘Judaism’” [his *emphasis*].
- 10 Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless, A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981); John G. Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975); Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul’s Ministry, Tent-Making and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); Bengt Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); Edwin A. Judge, *Rank and Status in the World of the Caesars and St. Paul* (Canterbury: University of Canterbury, 1984); Howard Clark Kee, *Christian Origins in Sociological Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980); Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981); idem, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology: Practical Models for Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986); Carolyn Osiek, *What Are They Saying About the Social Setting of the New Testament?* (New York: Paulist, 1984); Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); idem, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (ed. and trans. John H. Schuetz; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982); David C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles* (SBLDS 71; Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1983).
- 11 Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship,” *JBL* 107 (1988): 3–17; idem, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul’s Rhetoric* (Minneapolis:

studies,¹² and perspectives from the Two-thirds world.¹³ This progression offered new possibilities for marginalized voices to be heard from within the text and within biblical scholarship. As other interdisciplinary works developed at the turn of the 21st century,¹⁴ biblical studies, primarily from America, witnessed an explosion of projects centered on the relationship between the empire and its subjects, asking: How does the biblical text interact with the empire?¹⁵

Fortress, 1990). The feminist interpretations, however, are not meant to merely deal with gender issues alone, but all forms of oppression. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 5 exhorts, "[Feminism] cannot just be concerned with gender inequities and gender marginalization but must also address other forms of domination, such as racism, poverty, religious exclusion, heterosexism, and colonialism, all of which are inflected by gender and inflect gender."

- 12 Emilie M. Townes, "Response to 'New Testament and Roman Empire,'" *USQR* 59.3–4 (2005): 75–81. Like the feminist studies, African-American studies are not meant to merely deal with race issues alone, but all forms of oppression. Amos Jones Jr., *Paul's Message of Freedom: What Does It Mean to the Black Church?* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson, 1984), 38 suggests the proper understanding of freedom in a context of true *ekklesia* can be a source of liberation for "those who are bound—black people, Indians, Mexican American, women, homosexuals, and the white middle class." See also Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1949), 30–31.
- 13 R.S. Sugirtharajah, "Inter-Faith Hermeneutics: An Example and Some Implications," in *Voices from the Margins: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah; Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 352–363; Kwok Pui-lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995); Khiok-khng Yeo, "The Rhetorical Hermeneutic of 1 Corinthians 8 and Chinese Ancestor Worship," *BibInt* 2 (1994): 294–311.
- 14 Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsley, eds., *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (2d ed.; Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993); Pui-lan, *Discovering the Bible*; R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Voices from the Margins: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995); Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds., *Reading from This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Gerald West and Musa W. Dube, "Reading With": *An Exploration of the Interface between Critical and Ordinary Readings of the Bible* (Semeia 73; Atlanta: Scholars, 1996); Jerome H. Neyrey, ed., *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991); Philip F. Esler, *The First Christians in their Social Worlds: Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 1994); David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000).
- 15 While the reasons may vary, some scholars see the emergence of imperial inquiry in American biblical studies as connected to the deterioration of the 'separation of church and state' [see Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman*

This monograph labels this growing body of scholarship *Empire Studies*.¹⁶ Empire Studies utilizes an interpretative framework centering on the investigation, interrogation, and reconstruction of the socio-historical context of the author(s) and recipient(s) of the biblical text by consistently concentrating on the relationship (and/or interaction) between the empire and its subjects. To build the socio-historical milieu, Empire Studies employs numismatics, inscriptions, mosaics, frescoes, temples, historical texts, myths, and any other means of examining the imperial message communicated to the dominated subjects. The subject text is examined to identify parallels and trends of interaction to establish how the *people* under the empire engage those over them in the socio-political structure (e.g., resistance, acquiescence, etc.). As a result of Empire Studies, familiar texts have yielded fresh interpretative possibilities.

For example, in Mark 5:1–20, Jesus encounters a demon-possessed man in northeastern Palestine. Estranged and abandoned to the tombs (5:3–5), Mark depicts this marginalized man pleading with Jesus for mercy (5:7). During the dialogue, Jesus asks for the name of the unclean spirit (5:9a) and receives a peculiar response: “Legion is my name, for we are many” (5:9b; cf. 5:15). Empire Studies advocate Ched Myers notes that ‘Legion’ is a “Latinism” and that “this term had only one meaning in Mark’s social world: a division of Roman soldiers.”¹⁷

Imperial Society (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1997), 1; Warren Carter, “Proclaiming (in/against) Empire Then and Now,” *ww* 25.2 (2005): 149–158; Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5]. In addition, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the late 1940s also contributed to the interest in imperial relations within subject texts. The identification of ‘anti-imperial’ elements in these texts led scholars to inquire about parallel sentiments in canonical texts. In particular, the War Scroll (1QM; 4Q491–496) describes a great battle between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness culminating in the complete annihilation of the Darkness. Some scholars suggest that the ‘Kittim’ in the scroll (the army of Belial) refers to the Roman Imperial forces. See George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins: Diversity, Continuity, and Transformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

- 16 Although coming to the same terminology independently, Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 2006), 19 and Anatheia E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 223 also label this field of study as “Empire Studies” in passing comments. Throughout the rest of Moore’s discussion, he refers to the group as “X and Empire.”
- 17 Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), 191. Quoting J. Duncan M. Derrett, “Contributions to the Study of the Gerasene Demoniac,” *JSNT* 3 (1979): 5, Myers also suggests further imperial connections through terms like: ἀγγέλῃ (5:11), ἐπέτρεψεν (5:13a), and ὠρμησεν (5:13b).

The presence and destruction of a herd of pigs (5:11–13) strengthens the imperial connection in the text. Warren Carter draws attention to the Roman legion, stationed just north in Syria, known as the *Tenth Fretensis*.¹⁸ This military unit had an important role in the suppression of the Jewish revolt in 66–70 CE. Significantly, the legion's symbol, emblazoned on their Roman military standards, was the pig.¹⁹ This insight renders the townspeople's request for Jesus to "depart from their region" (5:17) as not surprising but quite logical. In addition to the possible economic ramifications of the herd's death, the crowd may also be concerned with the possible political consequences since Jesus "destroyed a symbol of Roman imperial control."²⁰ Reading the familiar text from a 'bottom up' perspective, then, uncovers socio-political layers to the imagery otherwise overlooked.²¹

The research question 'How does the biblical text interact with the empire?' persistently guides Empire Studies throughout the entire interpretative process

18 Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2001), 71; Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000), 212–213.

19 Another imperial connection to this text, thus far overlooked, is the Roman foundational myth of Remus and Romulus. These twin sons of the god Mars are raised by Faustulus after he retrieved them from the she-wolf who rescued them from the Tiber River. Faustulus was a swine herdsman for king Amulius. As a result, the progenitors of the Roman Empire worked "like their foster-father" as Amulius' swine herdsman "grazing his beasts on the Palatine" [T.P. Wiseman, *Remus: A Roman Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3].

20 Carter, *Margins*, 213–214. See also Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 65–68.

21 For other Empire Studies interpretations, see Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987); idem, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire*; idem, *Paul and Politics*; idem, *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2004); idem, *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008); Dieter Georgi, *Theocracy in Paul's Praxis and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994); Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004); J.K. Riches and D.C. Sim, eds., *The Gospel of Matthew in Its Roman Imperial Context* (London: T&T Clark, 2005); John Dominic Crossan, *God & Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (New York: Harper, 2007). For a strong critique of Empire Studies, see Seyoon Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

(e.g., word studies, historical observations, parallel passages, etc.).²² Thus, in Revelation 14:19, Empire Studies would not focus on the ancient procedure and action of acquiring juice from a first-century winepress. Instead, the analysis would concentrate on the luxury of the wine, how it was acquisitioned, how the acquisition affected the subjects of the empire, and other analogous inquiries.²³ To further appreciate the Empire Studies approach, the rest of this chapter examines the two primary influences that function as the water currents in the ocean of Empire Studies: 'Postcolonial Criticism' and 'Examinations of Dominance.'

Empire Studies Influence #1: Postcolonial Criticism²⁴

Advances in Postcolonial criticism parallel and influence the developments of Empire Studies. Postcolonial criticism refers to the reading of the text offered by marginalized interpreters living in (or originating from) formerly colonized regions of the world.²⁵ This is a growing platform of formerly mar-

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- 22 Deissmann, *Light*, 355–373 demonstrates imperial undertones in common biblical grammar like: Lord, Savior, high priest, Gospel, parousia, and others. Additionally, Deissmann, *Light*, 319–334 suggests the Pauline language of 'slavery' and 'ransom' were familiar terms to his impoverished audience for the manumission of slaves bought by the gods in Roman society.
- 23 Moore, *Empire*, 18 concurs, "What all [Empire Studies] share in common is a sustained focus on the theme of empire as an exegetical lens through which to reframe and reread selected New Testament texts." See also Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia, *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 5–10.
- 24 Moore, *Empire*, 7 specifies, "Postcolonial criticism is not a method of interpretation (any more than is feminist criticism, say) so much as a critical sensibility acutely attuned to a specific range of interrelated historical and textual phenomena."
- 25 At times, precise definitions for key terms in Postcolonial criticism prove elusive. Said, *Culture*, 9 defines colonialism as "the implanting of settlements on distant territory," while Moore, *Empire*, 4 (n. 4) describes the definition as "minimalistic." Even the use of the word 'Postcolonial' versus 'Post-colonial' lacks scholarly consensus. For discussions, see Anne McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post Colonialism,'" *SocT* 31 (1992): 84–98; Aijaz Ahmad, "Postcolonialism: What's in a Name?," in *Late Imperial Culture* (eds. Román de la Campa, E. Ann Kaplan, and Michael Sprinker; London: Verso, 1995), 11–32; and Bill Ashcroft, "On the Hyphen in Post-Colonial," *NLR* 32 (1996): 23–32. While the majority of Postcolonial theorists opt for the non-hyphenated 'Postcolonial' [Moore, *Empire*, 5], some suggest abandoning the term altogether [Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 57, which suggests 'tricontinentalism']

ginalized voices that offer unique perspectives on the biblical text.²⁶ The impetus of Postcolonial thought is credited to the works of Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi Bhabha,²⁷ which have been developed and advanced by the works of R.S. Sugirtharajah, Stephen D. Moore, and Fernando F. Segovia.²⁸

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- instead]. Regarding the definition of Postcolonialism (or Postcolonial studies), Aijaz Ahmad, "The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality," in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (ed. Padmini Mongia; London: Arnold, 1996), 283 laments, "Postcolonialism designates too many things all at once." Similarly, Jeremy Punt, "On Articulating Marginalization and Marginality," *JSNT* 30.4 (2008): 467 queries, "Is postcolonial studies one of those discourses that is apparently more easily recognized than described, not to mention, defined?" For further discussion, see Moore and Segovia, *Postcolonial*, 10; Fernando F. Segovia, "Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies: Toward a Postcolonial Optic," in *The Postcolonial Bible* (ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1998), 51 (n. 3); R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998), ix–x.
- 26 Sugirtharajah, *Asian*, 17. See Moore, *Empire*, 6, 79ff. for a discussion of the philosophical underpinnings of the criticism—typically associated with Poststructuralism and Postmodernism.
- 27 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978); idem, *Culture and Imperialism*; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (eds. Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313; idem, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1988); idem, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (London: Routledge, 1990); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). While many consider these authors the 'forefathers' of Postcolonialism, no conclusive history of the practice has yet to be developed [see Segovia, "Biblical Criticism," 49–65]. Nevertheless, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffins, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995) offer a great starting point.
- 28 R.S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1998); R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*; idem, *The Bible and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); idem, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (London: SCM, 2003); idem, "A Brief Memorandum on Postcolonialism and Biblical Studies," *JSNT* 73 (1999): 3–5; idem, "Biblical Studies after the Empire: From a Colonial to a Postcolonial Mode of Interpretation," in *The Postcolonial Bible* (ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1998), 12–22; idem, "A Postcolonial Exploration of Collusion and Construction in Biblical Interpretation," in *The Postcolonial Bible* (ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1998), 91–116; Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000); idem, "Biblical Criticism," 49–65; Moore and Segovia, *Postcolonial*; Moore, *Empire*.

Postcolonial criticism addresses “uneven relationships of power at the geopolitical level, the relationship between the imperial and the colonial.”²⁹ The marginalized voices, traditionally suppressed through the actions of colonization, are intentionally sought out as voices of criticism for their past and present plight.³⁰ Postcolonial criticism liberates these voices to speak and to be heard. This liberation is, in many ways, “a resurrection of the marginal, the indigene and the subaltern.”³¹

Nevertheless, Postcolonialism does not just offer the marginalized a platform to be heard; it offers them an identity to embrace. R.S. Sugirtharajah notes:

Generic and pan-Asian, pan-Latin American and pan-African theologies of the 1960s have given way to localized-identity and issue-specific theologies. The result has been the emergence of feminist, Dalit, Burakumin and tribal theological discourses. These theological articulations are largely attempts to grapple with subaltern status and to recover identity and authenticity.³²

The purpose of Postcolonial criticism, then, is to resurrect the marginalized voice and to liberate the suppressed identity of the dispossessed. In biblical studies, Postcolonial criticism accomplishes this through Fernando F. Segovia's three optics of interpretation: the world of the ancient text, the world of interpretations throughout history, and the world of modern readers.³³

29 Punt, “On Articulating,” 458.

30 The definition of ‘marginalized’ contains issues of “gender, economics, race, and sexuality” (see Punt, “On Articulating,” 457–458). Others broaden the purview to include the disabled [see Rosemarie Garland Thompson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997)].

31 Sugirtharajah, “Brief Memorandum,” 4. For a comparison of liberation criticism and Postcolonial criticism, see R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 116–117.

32 Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 3. Sugirtharajah, *Asian*, 16 also states, “. . . postcoloniality is about acquiring a new identity.” See also Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, “Whose Text Is It?—Presidential Address at SBL 2007,” *JBL* 127.1 (2008): 5–18; Harish Trivedi, “India and Post-colonial Discourse,” in *Interrogating Post-Colonialism: Theory, Text and Context* (eds. Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee; Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1996), 231–247.

33 Segovia, *Decolonizing*, 119–132.

Optic #1: The World of the Ancient Text

The key question for the initial optic is: 'What if the problem is the text itself?' This suspicion of the oppressive nature of the biblical text is apparent in statements like, "The political, economic, cultural, and religious dynamics in those empires between centralized authority and those without power heavily influenced the production of the Bible,"³⁴ or "... colonialism dominates and determines the interest of the biblical texts, and we could reasonably describe the Bible as a colonial document, though confessional and faith language often overlays and ignores the interconnecting postcolonial questions."³⁵ This leads to a methodology that does not merely reconstruct the ancient text to include the marginalized voices, but deconstructs the document itself.

For example, in handling the account of the Exodus, Boyung Lee challenges the traditional imagery of the Exodus as a story of liberation for future generations. Instead, she interprets the Exodus account through the eyes of the Canaanites and concludes that the biblical account does not espouse hopes of liberation but a "reverence for centralized power."³⁶ In other words, the text does not liberate, but rather it perpetuates dominance through Israel's appropriation of the land of Canaan.³⁷ Postcolonialists engage the biblical text to resurrect marginal voices by critically questioning the text itself.

Optic #2: The World of Interpretations throughout History

The second optic focuses on the interpretations of the biblical text throughout history, particularly in the eras of colonial dominance. This optic, like the previous, is saturated with suspicion given that "along with gunboats, opium, slaves, and treaties, the Christian Bible became a defining symbol of European expansion."³⁸ From the Postcolonial perspective, the bible's role in colonialization (a euphemism for oppressive dominance) ignites a desire to not only challenge the written text (optic #1) but the colonial interpretations of the text used to oppress the marginalized (optic #2).³⁹

Therefore, the second optic reinterprets the text from the perspectives and social contexts of the dominated. As Sugirtharajah writes:

34 Boyung Lee, "When the Text is the Problem: A Postcolonial Approach to Biblical Pedagogy," *RelEd* 102.1 (2007): 45.

35 Sugirtharajah, *Asian*, 19.

36 Lee, "Problem," 46 is quoting Kwok, *Discovering*, 30.

37 Lee, "Problem," 46.

38 Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Bible*, 1.

39 See M. Dube, "Toward a Post-Colonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible," *Semeia* 78 (1997): 17.

[Postcolonialism] will interrogate both colonial and metropolitan interpretations to draw attention to the inescapable effects of colonization and colonial ideals on interpretative works... It will also investigate interpretations that contested colonial interests and concerns. It will bring to the fore how the invaded, often caricatured as abused victims or grateful beneficiaries, transcended these images and wrested interpretation from the invaders, starting a process of self-discovery, appropriation and subversion.⁴⁰

Thus, the “ideologically loaded Bible” is liberated from the abusive trajectory implemented by the colonizers.⁴¹ This reinterpretation assists in the resurrection of the marginalized voice in order to recover the suppressed and disgraced identity.

Optic #3: The World of Modern Readers

In the third optic, Postcolonial criticism uses conclusions from the first two optics to inform and construct the identity of the modern, marginalized reader. The suspicion of the ancient text (optic #1) and the colonial interpretations throughout history (optic #2) positions the interpreter to address the world of the modern reader. This third optic is the goal of the Postcolonial interpretative process: a renewed identity. As Sugirtharajah summarizes, “At the same time, we embrace and transpose the ancient texts, and propel them to yield new meanings envisaged by the authors of the narratives, in order to meet our contemporary needs.”⁴²

The first two optics, then, unite in the final optic by wresting the text from the oppressive past and recontextualizing it for liberation in the present. Gyan Prakash eloquently describes this Postcolonial process:

The third world, far from being confined to its assigned space, has penetrated the inner sanctum of the first world in the process of being ‘third

40 Sugirtharajah, “Brief Memorandum,” 5.

41 See Sugirtharajah, *Asian*, 20; Brian K. Blount, *Can I Get a Witness?: Reading Revelation through African American Culture* (Louisville: John Knox, 2005), 72.

42 Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 2. The achievement of these three optics, from the Postcolonial perspective, is accomplished through an eclectic approach that utilizes a multitude of different studies, disciplines, and perspectives [see Sugirtharajah, “Brief Memorandum,” 5; Kwok, *Discovering*, 30; Laura E. Donaldson, “Postcolonialism and Biblical Reading: An Introduction,” *Semeia* 75 (1996): 1–14]. This eclectic approach is seen as a weakness by Punt, “On Articulating,” 457.

worlded’—arousing, inciting, and affiliating with the subordinated others in the first world. It has reached across boundaries and barriers to connect with the minority voices in the first world: socialists, radicals, feminists, minorities.⁴³

In sum, Postcolonial criticism attempts to liberate the voices of the marginalized through the implementation of three optics of interpretative criticism. The Postcolonial interpreter deconstructs the ancient text (optic #1) and its interpretations (optic #2) in order to construct a lucid reading from the perspective of the marginalized (optic #3)—a perspective that contributes to the emergence of a liberating identity.⁴⁴

43 Gyan Prakash, “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography,” *CSSH* 32.1 (1990): 403.

44 A Postcolonial interpretation of the book of Revelation can be found in Moore, *Empire*, 98ff. Using the three Postcolonial optics, Moore argues Revelation perpetuates the imperial system of dominance that climaxed in the Constantinian ‘Christian’ empire [p. 114; cf. Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis & Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 158, 171–172]. Three brief critiques bring balance to this suggestion. First, he does not root his discussion of the *sitz im leben* of Revelation in an historical context. Thorough discussions of the date of Revelation and the agenda of the Roman Empire are absent, both of which significantly impact the interpretation of Revelation. Second, he offers no evidence for his conclusions about the historical context of Revelation. The only primary source cited is the opening quote by Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 3.15, in which Constantine conflates the Roman Empire with Christianity—which is anachronistic at best. Third, he suggests Revelation exemplifies subjects longing for the position of the dominant by quoting Rev 11:15, “the kingdom of the world became the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.” However, Moore ignores the context of Rev 11:15. The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of God (11:15) only after the death of the two witnesses (11:3–14), which is a depiction of Jesus’ ministry and the intended ministry of his servants (the kingdom of God). Suffering, then, is how the kingdom of God overcomes the evil of the world (i.e. Rev 12:11; 13:10). No mass killing of their enemies occurs before this statement, just a depiction of the execution of God’s son saturated in the Old Testament imagery of the two witnesses (Zech 4:1–14). The suggestion, therefore, that Rev 11:15 is indicative of the overall desire to be in the position of imperial power simply ignores the possibility that Revelation is redefining the concepts of ‘power,’ ‘empire,’ ‘ruling,’ and ‘suffering’ altogether (see chapter 7 below). To suggest that Revelation perpetuates a Christian empire in the mold of the Roman Empire under Constantine—which has no historical basis beyond Moore’s imaginative construction without evidence, despite his assertion to the contrary (122)—imposes a self-referential agenda on the Apocalypse and disregards its message.

Similarities and Differences of Postcolonial Criticism and Empire Studies

While proponents of Empire Studies generally do not see themselves as offering Postcolonial interpretations,⁴⁵ some Postcolonialists see Empire Studies as a version of Postcolonial criticism.⁴⁶ The ambivalence of such categorizations is evident in Sze-kar Wan's statement in *Paul and Politics*, "My reading here is not strictly postcolonial, but in some aspects it does coincide with the goals of postcolonial studies in which ethnic integrity, self-determination, anti-colonial and anti-imperial concerns are all inextricably intertwined."⁴⁷ The key similarities and differences that create this ambiguous relationship are examined below to better understand the influence of Postcolonial criticism on Empire Studies.

The primary difference is the general absence of the last two optics of Postcolonial interpretation in Empire Studies: the world of interpretations throughout history (optic #2) and the world of modern readers (optic #3). Since the central element of Empire Studies is the socio-historical setting of the ancient text, the interpretations of the text throughout history simply rest outside of the purview of Empire Studies. Similarly, the goal of the third optic—to establish a new identity for the marginalized voices of today—rests outside of the scope of Empire Studies. Empire Studies does, in fact, try to resurrect the voices of the marginalized author(s) and recipient(s) in the biblical texts, but it is not as concerned with extending this pursuit to modern identities as in Postcolonialism.⁴⁸

45 Richard A. Horsley, "A Response to Robert Gundry's Review of *Hearing the Whole Story*," *JSNT* 26 (2003): 165. Horsley even offers a critique of Postcolonialism in Richard A. Horsley, "Subverting Disciplines: The Possibilities and Limitations of Postcolonial Theory for New Testament Studies," in *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia; Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003), 90–105.

46 Moore, *Empire*, 17 includes the following Empire Studies works under the Postcolonial 'umbrella': Horsley, ed., *Paul and Politics*; idem, *Paul and Empire*; Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*; idem, *Matthew and Empire*.

47 Sze-kar Wan, "Collection for the Saints as Anticolonial Act: Implications of Paul's Ethnic Reconstruction," in *Paul and Politics* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg: Trinity, 2000), 192 (n. 5).

48 While this is a difference, it does not mean that the pursuit of Postcolonialism is either unnecessary or misguided. Instead, Empire Studies affirms the efforts of Postcolonial interpretations but simply does not share the same goal. Similarly, this monograph does not follow the same 'modern day identity' pursuit of Postcolonial interpretations. This is not a critique of their goal, but simply a difference. Nevertheless, this is not *always* the case in Empire Studies. In Horsley's, *In the Shadow of Empire*, each article concludes with

The primary intersection of the two studies is in the first optic: the world of the ancient text. The assumptions and objectives of each approach, however, differ quite widely. As Sugirtharajah exclaims, “The interest of postcolonial criticism does not lie in the truth of the text but in the central question of its promotion of colonial ideology. Postcolonial biblical criticism will look for textual indicators which underscore colonial ideologies and investigate these texts for collusion with the establishment.”⁴⁹ Thus, Postcolonial theory views the biblical text as the source of the problem in the colonizers’s interpretations throughout history.

Conversely, Empire Studies is not suspicious of the document itself but apolitical assumptions about the text. Empire Studies demonstrates that the text has been ‘de-politicized’ by some (whether intentionally or unintentionally) and that ‘re-politicizing’ the text clarifies the intent of the author (in light of the relationship of the dominant to the dominated).⁵⁰ Therefore, the problem for Empire Studies is not the text itself but the ‘de-politicized’ interpretations of the text.⁵¹

Notwithstanding clear differences, Postcolonial criticism and Empire Studies do share significant similarities. Methodologically, both disciplines employ an eclectic approach to their interpretations through various disciplines, studies, perspectives, and criticisms. Empire Studies uses the historical-critical methodology but also focuses on sociological, anthropological, and political insights to develop its understanding of the relationship between the sovereigns and their subjects. Likewise, Postcolonial criticism develops its interpretations from the insights of gender criticism, queer criticism, and an amalgamation of other marginalized perspectives. The eclectic methodology of both approaches allows the text to be viewed from a perspective of multi-layered voices.

Both approaches to the text also share a key assumption and a key observation that lead to a shared goal, albeit with different emphases. Mutually, Postcolonial approaches and Empire Studies assume that there are unexplored

a description of how its imperial analysis of the biblical text impacts the modern church in the United States. Still with marked differences, this focus on the modern day reader(s) resembles the third optic of Postcolonial criticism. See also Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 129–149.

49 Sugirtharajah, *Asian*, 19.

50 *Contra* Kim, *Christ and Caesar*.

51 Another difference suggested by Richard A. Horsley, “Submerged Biblical Histories and Imperial Biblical Studies,” in *The Postcolonial Bible* (ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1998), 161, 165–166 is that Postcolonial critics reject the idea of metanarratives—presumably related to their postmodern philosophical underpinnings.

power struggles in any given social setting that need to be acknowledged and examined. Likewise, both positions observe that among many perspectives there is a false dichotomy: complete resistance from the subject or absolute complicity from the subject. Through their different approaches, both standpoints suggest that the relationship of the dominated and the dominant is much more complex and conflated than previously asserted.

This assumption and observation lead each discipline to a common goal: a search for the suppressed voice of the marginalized.⁵² With distinct nuances to this commonality, Postcolonialism (the voice of the modern day marginalized) and Empire Studies (the voice of the ancient marginalized) approach the text from the perspective of the dominated and seek to resurrect the suppressed voice(s) to examine how the text interacts with the dominant society. Therefore, while the differences between the two approaches are sufficient enough to see each discipline as distinct from the other, their similarities encourage mutual influence.⁵³

Empire Studies Influence #2: Examinations of Dominance

Traditionally, political revolutions—both suppressed and successful—were posited as principal evidence for the existence of any unrest against the empire. Thus, an unspoken assumption evolved: if no evidence of revolutions existed, then there was conciliatory peace from the imperial heights to the depths of the slums.⁵⁴ Recent inquiries into the arts of resistance, however, show that violence is not the only means of resistance practiced by subjects under sovereign dominance.⁵⁵

52 Laura Salah Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture: The Second-Century Church Amid the Spaces of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2010), 9.

53 Among other factors, it is difficult to consider this present work a Postcolonial interpretation of Revelation given that the viewpoint is from a white-western-male perspective. Sakenfeld, "Whose Text," 11 expresses this difficulty, "As post-colonial feminists from among the colonized are calling for women like myself (and men as well) to engage their work and their approach, I as a first-world, white feminist can perhaps best make clear my sense of my place by describing myself as a 'pro-postcolonial feminist' (on the analogy of a 'pro-woman man' entering into white feminist biblical interpretation)."

54 So Meeks, *First Urban*, 11–12.

55 As Carter, "Proclaiming (in/against)," 154 writes, "...often in peasant societies, resistance is expressed in more covert, self-protective, and calculated ways. These acts might include cheating on taxes, sabotage, go-slows, apparently inadvertent non-expressions of honor (a sneer, no greeting), subversive songs and stories, seizing initiative from the

An often quoted Ethiopian proverb within Empire Studies is, “When the great lord passes, the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts.”⁵⁶ This interaction between the ‘great lord’ and the ‘wise peasant’ demonstrates a key area of interest that drives the historical inquiries of Empire Studies: the complex interaction between the dominant and the dominated. How do subjects engage sovereigns? Is it always complicit? Is it always rebellious? Is it with persistent disdain? Is it with resilient loyalty? These questions permeate the pages of Empire Studies (whether stated explicitly or not); the same questions are also found in the works of the Postcolonial harbinger Homi Bhabha and the socio-political anthropologist James C. Scott.

The Work of Homi Bhabha

In *The Location of Culture*,⁵⁷ Homi Bhabha examines the interaction of the dominated and the dominant “under a tree outside Delhi” in May 1817.⁵⁸ Stephen D. Moore describes Bhabha’s distinct perspective as “a predisposition to construe life under colonialism as characterized less by unequivocal opposition to the colonizer than by unequal measures of loathing and admiration, resentment and envy, rejection and imitation, resistance and cooption, separation and surrender.”⁵⁹ Bhabha observes a complex relationship between the colonizer and the colonized which creates an interaction of ‘ambivalence’ characterized not by opposition but simultaneous retraction and expulsion. For it is under the tree outside of Delhi that Bhabha observes the subjects’ embrace of the Bible (retraction) but with their own intended purposes (expulsion). This creates a potentially subversive interaction that Bhabha terms ‘sly civility.’⁶⁰

Bhabha categorizes these ‘ambivalent’ interactions between the colonizer and the colonized as hybridity and mimicry.⁶¹ For Bhabha, ‘hybridity’ is a term that describes the ambivalent exchange of complicity and resistance between

powerful . . . These discreet acts of nonviolent, active resistance challenge the public and official versions of reality, secure some honor and dignity for the powerless, and keep alive hopes and visions of different forms of societal interaction.”

56 James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), v.

57 Other scholars engaging Bhabha’s work include: Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 53, 88, 135 (n. 46); Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 63 (n. 71), 74–75.

58 Thus Bhabha’s chapter 6 is entitled, “Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817.”

59 Moore, *Empire*, x.

60 Bhabha, *Location*, 121. On Bhabha’s unique contribution to the Postcolonial perspective, see Moore, *Empire*, 89.

61 Bhabha, *Location*, 53, 71.

the two groups in what he calls the ‘Third Space.’⁶² It is in this ‘Third Space’ that the empire and its subjects interact and communicate in order to construct the society, deconstruct the society, and sometimes both at the same time. Hybridity in the ‘Third Space,’ then, is an interaction that is ambiguous at best, especially in light of the practice of mimicry.⁶³

In his description of mimicry, Bhabha wrestles with the ambiguous representations manifested in society.⁶⁴ The subjects are expected to mimic the culture enforced by the colonizers in the ‘Third Space.’ This forced imitation, however, offers the potential for the subjects to ostensibly heed the directive but also insert their own subtle parody of the colonizers. As Moore summarizes, the imitation “strategy is fraught with risk for the colonizer . . . and replete with opportunity for the colonized, because such mimicry can all too easily slip over into mockery thereby menacing the colonizer’s control.”⁶⁵ Thus, what colonizers perceive as hegemonic enforcement (cultural imitation), the colonized perceive as an opportunity to assert their identity through mimicry in the ‘Third Space’ (hybridity). As Václav Havel once stated, “Society is a very mysterious animal with many faces and hidden potentialities, and . . . it’s extremely shortsighted to believe that the face society happens to be presenting to you at a given moment is its only true face. None of us knows all the potentialities that slumber in the spirit of the population.”⁶⁶

Bhabha presents the interpreter with a colonized world filled with interactions shrouded in ambiguity. The simple categories of ‘complicit subjects’ or ‘rebellious subjects’ overlook the uncertainty in the hybridity of the ‘Third Space;’ mimicry could be interpreted as reinforcing the culture imposed by the colonizers, subverting the dominant society through parody, or even both simultaneously. What Bhabha offers, therefore, is a world of dominance and resistance ensconced in ambivalence.

62 Ibid., 37–39, 131, 146–148. See also, idem, “The Third Space: Interview with Homi K. Bhabha,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (ed. Jonathan Rutherford; London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991), 207–221.

63 Moore, *Empire*, 110–111.

64 Bhabha, *Location*, 121–123, 125–126, 128–129, 172, 174.

65 Moore, *Empire*, 13.

66 Quoted by Scott, *Domination*, v. Friesen, *Imperial*, 20 concurs, “So we must beware of placid social depictions that ignore dissonance. A contrapuntal reading of society might reveal an unruly, unharmonious ensemble.”

*The Work of James C. Scott*⁶⁷

In 1987, James C. Scott published *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*.⁶⁸ This book is the culmination of Scott's anthropological work in a small, agrarian community in Malaysia impoverished by the introduction of new technologies and overbearing landlords that ravaged both the land and the community. During his stay he noticed a distinct incongruity between the manner in which the peasants spoke to their superiors and the way they spoke to each other (behind closed doors). Scott noticed the rich engaged in the same discordant practices—speaking to the poor in one manner and then speaking to each other in a completely different fashion (behind closed doors).⁶⁹ While the last chapter of *Weapons of the Weak* attempts to draw out some of these implications, Scott's later publication *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* extrapolates these findings.⁷⁰ Beginning with the assumption that similar forms of dominance occur in a wide range of settings (e.g., slavery, caste-systems, feudalism, etc.),⁷¹ Scott attempts to develop a model to sort out the ambivalence observed by Bhabha.⁷²

67 Interchange between biblical scholars and James C. Scott is not unique to this monograph. The following sources interact with James C. Scott: John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); idem, *The Birth of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998); Richard A. Horsley with John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985; repr., Harrisburg: Trinity, 2000); Horsley, *Spiral*; idem, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement* (New York: Crossroad, 1989); Richard A. Horsley and Jonathan A. Draper, *Whoever Hears You Hears Me: Prophets, Performance, and Tradition in Q* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1999); William R. Herzog, II, *Jesus, Justice and the Reign of God: A Ministry of Liberation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000); Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (SemeiaSt 48; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004); Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 5–6, 31–43, 226.

68 *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

69 Scott, *Domination*, ix.

70 Ibid., ix.

71 Scott's conflation of such a vast array of scenarios has rightly received critique. See David Field, "Book Review: *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* by James C. Scott," *AHR* 99.1 (1994): 196.

72 This is not to suggest that Bhabha and Scott rely on each other for their research. They do not. Indeed, neither refers to the other nor displays notable interaction with the other's field. Nevertheless, their observations betray remarkable congruity.

Through an eclectic array of evidence,⁷³ Scott examines the complexities of the relationships between the dominant and the dominated. More specifically, Scott intends to prove the existence of subtle forms of resistance even amidst seemingly tranquil, complicit settings. In light of the fact that settings of dominance deny the dominated the privilege of “trading a slap for a slap, an insult for an insult,”⁷⁴ Scott suggests that subjects must engage in more unique manners of resistance. Quoting Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, Scott offers an example of such an attitude of subtle subversion, “Live with your head in the lion’s mouth. I want you to overcome ‘em with yeses, undermine ‘em with grins, agree ‘em to death and destruction, let ‘em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open. . . . Learn it to the young ‘uns” [sic].⁷⁵

Scott’s examination assumes that complete hegemony (ideological domination) by an empire is impossible to absolutely enforce.⁷⁶ Scott interprets this impossibility as indicative of the incongruent conversations that occur ‘onstage’ and ‘offstage.’ Scott suggests:

On the open stage the serfs or slaves will appear complicitous in creating an appearance of consent and unanimity; the show of discursive affirmations from below will make it seem as if ideological hegemony were secure . . . By a social alchemy that is not, after all, so mysterious, the dross of domination produces the public discursive affirmations that *seem* to transform that domination into the gold of willing, even enthusiastic, consent.⁷⁷

73 While some see this as a positive aspect of Scott’s work [see Richard A. Horsley, “Introduction—Jesus, Paul, and the ‘Arts of Resistance’: Leaves from the Notebook of James C. Scott,” in *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; SemeiaSt 48; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 2], Louis Segal, “Book Review: *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* by James C. Scott,” *AgrH* 66.1 (1992): 87 disagrees, “. . . because Scott draws from such a variety of social sciences, his eclecticism at times approaches methodological discordance.” Segal also points out that this eclectic approach has led Scott to some historical inaccuracies in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (p. 87). Despite these weaknesses, Segal concludes, “All this being said, this book is an heuristically important contribution.”

74 Scott, *Domination*, xii.

75 Ibid., 133.

76 Ibid., 85.

77 Ibid., 87, 93.

For Scott, the ambivalence of Bhabha is not due to the struggle within the subject between 'retraction' and 'expulsion' but evidence of a 'hidden transcript' within the 'public transcript.'

To understand Scott's contribution to the discussion of domination, it is imperative to define his key terms: public transcript and hidden transcript. The public transcript is

... a shorthand way of describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate... *Public* here refers to action that is openly avowed to the other party in the power relationship, and *transcript* is used almost in its juridical sense (process verbal) of a complete record of what was said. This complete record, however, would also include nonspeech acts such as gestures and expressions.⁷⁸

Scott's description of the public transcript parallels the 'Third Space' of Bhabha. Scott, however, emphasizes domination in that the public transcript—the established rules of interaction between subjects and sovereigns—is the 'common space' where those in power enforce "the *self*-portrait of dominant elites as they would have themselves seen."⁷⁹ In other words, the public transcript is the 'Third Space' not just where the dominant and the subjects interact (hybridity), but the stage upon which the sovereign ideology is enforced and enacted.

The public transcript, then, is not concerned with the desires or opinions of the subjects but merely the enactment of the world as dictated by the sovereigns. The public transcript functions to "define for subordinate groups what is realistic and what is not realistic and to drive certain aspirations and grievances into the realm of the impossible, of idle dreams."⁸⁰ This is enforced in the public transcript through ideologically loaded symbols including rituals, titles, architecture, and other displays of power.⁸¹ In sum, the public transcript is the sociological enactment of the ideological world of the dominant that disallows a voice for subject discord in the 'common space.' Scott is quick to

78 Ibid., 2. See Appendix A on p. 245.

79 Scott, *Domination*, 18 [his *emphasis*].

80 Ibid., 74.

81 Ibid., 45. While violence is sometimes used in the public transcript to enforce dominance, it is commonly avoided by the sovereigns. To resort to violence is, in some manner, to admit that the dominant hegemony has failed to accomplish its task—the suppression of the marginalized voices into complicit obedience [Elizabeth Koepping, personal conversation (6 November 2009)]. Nevertheless, the threat of violence was never far off.

point out, however, that this does not mean that the subjects do not speak in the public transcript. Since not all conversations can take place in the public transcript, Scott presents another term to describe the conversations that do not occur 'onstage': the hidden transcript.

Both subordinates and sovereigns have hidden transcripts but with different purposes for their 'offstage' discussions. According to Scott, there are two key purposes for the dominant hidden transcript. First, the sovereign elite must maintain a visage of complete unity in the public transcript. "If the dominant are at odds with one another in any substantial way, they are, to that degree, weakened, and subordinates may be able to exploit the divisions and renegotiate the terms of subordination."⁸² The disagreements between the elites, then, are consigned to the hidden transcript 'offstage,' never revealed in the 'Third Space.'

Second, the dominant hidden transcript attempts to conceal the futility of their ascendancy allowing their appearance on the 'public stage' to reinforce their view of themselves and, consequently, to perpetuate the image of supremacy. To illustrate this, Scott describes the dangers of the dominant hidden transcript surfacing in the public transcript, "In Genet's *The Screens*, set in Algeria, the Arab farm laborers kill their European overseer when his Arab maid discovers that he has used padding on his stomach and buttocks to make an imposing appearance. Once he is reduced to ordinary proportions, they are no longer intimidated."⁸³ Thus, the dominant hidden transcript—whether used to disseminate the perception of unity or the appearance of supremacy—functions to conceal any discordance between the dominant ideology found in the public transcript and the porous reality.

The subject hidden transcript, like the dominant, consists of conversations and practices that occur offstage, but the primary difference, according to Scott, is that the subject hidden transcript exists to contradict the public transcript and not reinforce it.⁸⁴ The production of the subject hidden tran-

82 Scott, *Domination*, 56.

83 Ibid., 50.

84 Ibid., 4. Although they are not privy to its complete contents (most of the time), the dominant normally suspect the existence of the subject hidden transcript. "Noting that her slaves fell uncharacteristically silent whenever the latest news from the front in the Civil War became a topic of white conversation, Mary Chesnut took their silence as one that hid something. "They go about in their black masks, not a ripple of emotion showing; and yet on all other subjects except the war they are the most excitable of all races. Now Dick might be a very respectable Egyptian Sphinx, so inscrutably silent he is" [Scott, *Domination*, 3 quoting from Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, 208].

script includes three key elements. First, a 'social space' for the contradictory opinions to be voiced must exist. This location provides a platform for the "full-throated expression" of the muted "riposte, stifled anger, and bitten tongues" forced on the subordinates in the public transcript.⁸⁵ Second, the hidden transcript requires human agents to mature the seeds of angst into a subversive message which is then circulated in the subject community.⁸⁶ Finally, the hidden transcript necessitates what Scott calls 'infrapolitics' in which the subject leaders manage and enforce the message amongst the subjects.⁸⁷

Once the subject hidden transcript is generated, Scott asks the question, 'How is this hidden transcript communicated in the public transcript?'⁸⁸ With different nuances and purposes, Scott offers two paths of communication for the subject hidden transcript in the public transcript: explicit revelation and implicit revelation.

Explicit revelation of the subject hidden transcript in the public transcript occurs in two manifestations. The first attempts to protect anonymity by keeping a safe distance from the sovereign in the public transcript. Quoting events from George Orwell, as an English colonizer in Burma in the 1920s, Scott refers to this type of explicit revelation:

85 Scott, *Domination*, 120. Insightfully, Arlene Elowe MacLeod, "Book Review: *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* by James C. Scott," *Signs* 18.3 (1993): 690 asks, "What kinds of resistances might emerge, for instance, in situations where separate spheres are not the rule and women have little space to create a world of 'backstage' behavior?" Scott never addresses this issue.

86 Scott, *Domination*, 123–124.

87 *Ibid.*, 183ff.

88 This question, however, skips another question which should precede it, 'Do the subjects desire for their hidden transcript to surface in the public transcript?' In reference to the African-American slave tale "Brer Rabbit," Scott, *Domination*, 164 regards it as a subversive hidden transcript and emphatically states, "It is customary to treat oral traditions like the Brer Rabbit tales as communication among slaves and then to gauge their role in the socialization of a spirit of resistance. What this ignores is the publicness of the Brer Rabbit stories. They were not told just offstage in the slave quarters. The place of such tales as part of the public transcript suggests a line of interpretation. It suggests that, for any subordinate group, there is tremendous desire and will to express publicly what is in the hidden transcript, even if that form of expression must use metaphors and allusions in the interest of safety." This assumption is tenuous at best. Many subjects avoid any potential confrontation in the public transcript (including their hidden transcript) due to the clear consequences of such insubordination. For a similar critique, see Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 36–37.

Anti-European feeling was very bitter. No one had the guts to raise a riot, but if a European woman went through the bazaars alone somebody would probably spit betel juice over her dress . . . When a nimble Burman tripped me up on the football field and the referee (another Burman) looked the other way, the crowd yelled with hideous laughter . . . In the end the sneering yellow faces of the young men that met me everywhere, the insults hooted after me when I was at a safe distance, got badly on my nerves. The young Buddhist priests were the worst of all.⁸⁹

Orwell's description reveals the blatant manner in which the hidden transcript of the Burmese subjects was made known in the public transcript. However, it was done from a safe distance to preserve anonymity, thereby avoiding direct repercussions.

The second type of explicit revelation is open rebellion. Often, the historically documented moments of revolts or revolutions are the only evidence acknowledged by historians that subjects of a dominant regime are disgruntled by their current plight. What Scott suggests, however, is open rebellions are never spontaneous; instead, they point to the existence of a hidden transcript now revealed in the public transcript. Scott writes:

I believe that the notion of a hidden transcript helps us understand those rare moments of political electricity when, often for the first time in memory, the hidden transcript is spoken directly and publicly in the teeth of power . . . What is rare, then, is not the negation of domination in thought but rather the occasions on which subordinate groups have been able to act openly and fully on that thought.⁹⁰

89 Scott, *Domination*, 14, quoting George Orwell, *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), 91.

90 Scott, *Domination*, xiii, 102. Scott does not adequately elaborate on the connection between hidden transcripts and violent revolutions—only allowing the conversation a small portion in the last chapter of the book. Timothy J. Lukes, "Book Review: *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* by James C. Scott," *APSR* 85.4 (1991): 1454 concurs, "More troubling, though, is Scott's slapdash attempt to link the hidden transcripts to extemporaneous insubordination and finally to overt political rebellion. With no more than seven pages to go in the book, he admits, 'What we have yet to explain is how an initial act of defiance that may originate in bravado, anger, or gestures can occasionally bring on an avalanche of defiance' (p. 220). Needless to say, the discussion that follows is hardly satisfying, made more problematic by its romanticization of defiance."

Scott considers the presence of blatant manifestations of resistance in the public transcript (both at a safe distance and open rebellion) as evidence of a hidden transcript developed and rehearsed in the social space of the subordinates.

Second, the subjects' hidden transcript surfaces in implicit ways in the public transcript. This section of the analysis is what dominates Scott's study as he looks at "rumors, gossip, folktales, songs, gestures, jokes, and theater of the powerless as vehicles by which, among other things, they insinuate a critique of power while hiding behind anonymity or behind innocuous understandings of their conduct."⁹¹ In other words, all interactions between the subjects and the sovereigns in the public transcript potentially reveal the hidden transcript of the subordinates, especially acts of deference.

When complicity is demonstrated in the public transcript, Scott assumes that the subordinate groups, schooled in the art of disguising their true emotions and motives, are actually communicating disdain through parody, mimicry (cf. Bhabha), or some other form of subversion. Scott writes, "What may look from above like the extraction of a required performance can easily look from below like the artful manipulation of deference and flattery to achieve its own ends."⁹² To state it differently, the subject hidden transcript persistently lingers below the surface of the public transcript and emerges not just in acts of rebellion but also in acts of complicit deference.

The purpose of the implicit revelation in the public transcript is for the subject to regain dignity and establish an identity—both of which were wrested from them by the dominant. In a powerful depiction, Scott purports:

We know relatively little about a Malay villager if we know only that he is poor and landless. We know far more about the cultural meaning of his poverty once we know that he is particularly in despair because he cannot afford to feed guests on the feast of Ramadan, that wealthy people pass him on the village path without uttering a greeting, that he cannot bury his parents properly, that his daughter will marry late if at all because he lacks a dowry, that his sons will leave the household early since he has no property to hold them, and that he must humble himself—often to no avail—to beg for work and rice from wealthier neighbors. To know the cultural meaning of his poverty in this way is to learn the shape of his indignity and, hence, to gauge the content of his anger. Dignity is at once a very private and a very public attribute.⁹³

⁹¹ Scott, *Domination*, xiii.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 34.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 113.

The effects of dominance go far beyond the appropriation of land or goods, but rather, dominance defines the worth and identity of individuals involved in the hegemonic system, whether voluntarily or involuntarily.⁹⁴ The moments of implicit revelation of the hidden transcript allow the subject to reclaim some of that dignity and identity ostensibly allocated by the sovereign force.

Comparing Homi Bhabha and James C. Scott

The examinations of dominance by Homi Bhabha and James C. Scott intersect and bifurcate in multiple areas, but two key points of convergence issue a strong challenge to historians. First, Bhabha and Scott both point out there is something deeper than meets the proverbial 'eye' in power relations. Colonial and imperially-dominated settings are riddled with intricate webs of domination, resistance, and acquiescence, particularly in the public forum (the 'Third Space' or 'Public Transcript'). This complexity shatters the false assumption that when torrent rebellion is not visible then everyone is satisfied with the current situation of power relations.

Such an observation leads to the second point of intersection between Bhabha and Scott: other forms of resistance, outside of open rebellion, exist and are implemented on a daily basis. While Bhabha refers to these more subtle subversions in his description of mimicry, Scott labels these acts as the subject hidden transcript. Both terms, however, point to a complex interchange of ideological discord between the subjects and the sovereigns, a complexity which suggests that even acts of deference may be forms of sedition.

These two points of convergence for Bhabha and Scott strongly caution the historian not to take the accounts, predominately written by the dominant, at face value, because the voices of the subjects are intentionally suppressed so as not to be heard.⁹⁵ So Scott writes, "It is in precisely this public domain where

94 Ibid., 3 makes this untenable claim regarding domination, "... the greater the disparity in power between dominant and subordinate and the more arbitrarily it is exercised, the more the public transcript of subordinates will take on a stereotyped, ritualistic cast. In other words, the more menacing the power, the thicker the mask." It is also possible that instead of the 'mask' becoming thicker, there may be a level of acceptance by the subjects as 'dominated.' Without recourse to hopeful rebellion, the subjects may come to a point in which their identity and hope are completely absorbed into the hegemony of the elite. To state, then, that a hidden transcript must still exist but it is just harder to find is simply to deny the range of possibilities for human reaction to extreme accounts of dominance.

95 This statement does not insinuate that historians have been guilty of uncritical examination of historical documents—for historians have both accepted and been skeptical of historical documents for centuries. Nevertheless, historians have, at times, embraced the false dichotomy challenged by Bhabha and Scott that when there is no rebellion in the

the effects of power relations are most manifest, and any analysis based exclusively on the public transcript is likely to conclude that subordinate groups endorse the terms of their subordination and are willing, even enthusiastic, partners in that subordination.”⁹⁶

Conclusion

Empire Studies investigates subject texts for interactions with the dominant imperial message. That is, Empire Studies attempts to answer the question, ‘How does the biblical text interact with the empire?’ The influences of

historical document then ‘all is well’ in the empire. For example, Lawrence Waddy, in his book *Pax Romana and World Peace* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1950), explains in blissful terms the life of a slave under the sovereignty of the Romans and then concludes, “... the lot of these slaves cannot have been very miserable, because the individual Roman was not by nature a cruel master” (p. 190). Elsewhere, he describes the subjugation of Britain and subsequent permeation of Roman culture in terms strongly supporting the Roman actions and even suggesting the Britons were, on some level, grateful: “To call Romanization ‘slavery’ is perverse. Admittedly the material benefits of Roman rule were badly shared out among the Britons; but nobody could seriously maintain that Britain could have been better off or more ‘free’ outside the Roman Commonwealth in the days of the *Pax Romana* ... I do not picture [the Briton] as a down-trodden slave of Rome, but as a reasonably happy British workman, freed at least from the necessity of taking part in the old tribal wars of pre-Roman days” (pp. 156–157, 158). After a description of the persecution of Christians under Nero and Domitian, Waddy awkwardly concludes, “The quality of life among the early Christians, under the rule of what the Revelation calls the ‘scarlet coloured beast,’ was very wonderful indeed” (p. 225). This attitude is challenged by Bhabha and Scott. As Krister Stendahl, “The Bible as Classic and Holy Scripture,” *JBL* 103.1 (1984): 3 challenges, “Could it be that preoccupation with history comes natural when one is part of a culture which feels happy and hopeful about the historical process?”

96 Scott, *Domination*, 4. The subject voices are not readily apparent in historical texts due to three key factors. First, history is predominately written by the elites—in that history adds to and takes away from the public transcript. Second, the non-elites intentionally disguise their voices, especially when dissonant, so as not to be heard clearly, if at all. Third, the elites may intentionally choose not to record or report any discovered elements of subversion. The presence of such subversion reflects poorly on the ruling hegemony and could possibly invite other rebellious acts (Scott, *Domination*, 89). Because of these factors, Scott, *Domination*, 89 suggests, “Someone examining the newspapers, speeches, and public documents of the period a few decades hence would find little or no trace of this conflict.” Field, “Book Review,” 196 adds, “The problem, perhaps, is not so much that the transcript of the subordinate is hidden as that it is cacophonous.” See also Deissmann, *Light*, 7.

'Postcolonial Criticism' and 'Examinations of Dominance' posture the investigation to view history from the complex and multi-faceted perspective of the dominated. As seen above, familiar texts are offered fresh interpretative possibilities from this imperial re-contextualization in Empire Studies.

With similar trajectories, the Alter-Imperial paradigm engages the Apocalypse as a subject text by asking the question, 'How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?' While the advances in Empire Studies are promising for Revelation scholarship, significant methodological weaknesses suggest the need for further development.

Empire Studies and the Alter-Imperial Paradigm

The complex interactions between subjects and sovereigns demand rigorous investigations into the imperial world. Influenced by ‘Postcolonial Criticism’ and ‘Examinations of Dominance,’ Empire Studies has emerged as a poignant interpretive lens offering fresh insights on ancient texts. Nevertheless, examinations of Empire Studies in Jesus, Paul, and Revelation reveal three methodological weaknesses: [1] ‘anti-imperial’ assumptions, [2] textual assertions, and [3] historical-contextual ambiguity. This chapter examines these methodological pitfalls and offers a way forward through an Alter-Imperial paradigm that builds upon the works of Homi Bhabha and James C. Scott.

Methodological Weakness #1: ‘Anti-Imperial’ Assumptions

At times, Empire Studies interpreters are called ‘anti-imperial’ interpreters.¹ While this name may be unfair for some, for other leading Empire Studies proponents, this title describes their initial assumption quite accurately. For whether the study focuses on Jesus, Paul, or elsewhere, the general trajectory of Empire Studies has been to look for ‘anti-imperial’ elements under every exegetical rock and ignore any complicit tendencies of the documents altogether.

For example, Richard Horsley, a leading voice in Empire Studies, describes Jesus’ mission and purpose as a product of his cultural milieu,² in which, “Jesus was proclaiming that God was in the process of effecting the ‘political revolution’ that would overthrow the Roman imperial order in Palestine.”³ This ‘anti-imperial’ trajectory is proved, then, through exegetical assertions that seem, at times, quite forced.

1 Seyoon Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), chapter 2 (p. 11), “Anti-Imperial Interpretation of Other Pauline Epistles” or chapter 4 (p. 34), “Factors that Make an Anti-Imperial Interpretation Difficult.”

2 See Richard A. Horsley with John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets & Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985; repr., Harrisburg: Trinity, 2000).

3 Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 103. See also Warren Carter, “Proclaiming (in/against) Empire Then and Now,” *WW* 25.2 (2005): 154; cf. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 126.

For instance, in *Jesus and Empire*, Horsley gives an interpretation of the two women in Mark 5:21–43 that are in need of Jesus’ healing; the woman “who had been hemorrhaging for *twelve years* and the nearly dead *twelve-year-old girl*.”⁴ After connecting the two women symbolically to the people of Israel, Horsley proposes an ‘anti-imperial’ conclusion to the account that, for him, characterizes other healing accounts as well:

The original hearers of the Gospel would have known tacitly and implicitly . . . that both the individual and the social hemorrhaging and near death were *the effects of the people’s subjection to imperial forces*. Thus as the woman’s faith that special powers are working through Jesus, leading her to take the initiative in touching his garment, results in her healing, so also the people’s trust that God’s restorative powers are working through Jesus is leading to their recovery from *the death-dealing domination by Roman imperial rule*. When Jesus brings the seemingly dead twelve-year-old girl back to life just at the time she has come of age to produce children, he is mediating new life to Israel in general. *In these and other episodes Jesus is healing the illnesses brought on by Roman imperialism*.⁵

Similarly, the ‘anti-imperial’ bias guides Horsley in events like the Beelzebub controversy (Mk 3:22–28) and Jesus’ proclamation of “Let the little children come to me” (Mk 10:13–16) to suggest that the events are a declaration of the judgment of the rulers of Rome due to the mere mention of the phrase ‘the kingdom of God.’⁶

These forced ‘anti-imperial’ interpretations are also found in Horsley’s exegesis of Jesus’ exorcism accounts. Under the heading “Roman Imperialism Implicated in Jesus’ Exorcisms,”⁷ Horsley suggests that in Mark 1:25 the use of ‘vanquishes’ (*epitiman*) instead of ‘cast out’ (*ekballein*) carries an ‘anti-Roman’ message to the exorcism. With only one citation as evidence (1QM 14.9–11), Horsley suggests that ‘vanquishes’ (*epitiman*) “was used with reference to Yahweh/God coming in judgment against foreign imperial regimes who had subjected Israel.”⁸ This minor shift in Mark 1:25 leads Horsley to this ‘anti-imperial’ conclusion of Jesus’ exorcism ministry:

4 Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 109 [his *emphasis*].

5 Ibid., 109 [*emphasis added*].

6 Ibid., 82–83.

7 Ibid., 99.

8 Ibid., 100.

The “unclean spirit” (Mark 2:24) [*sic*—it is actually Mark 1:24] indicates precisely what is happening: “Have you come to destroy us?” Note the plural “us.” The unclean spirit knows who Jesus is and what he is doing: Jesus is God’s agent whose “kingdom of God” program of vanquishing demons is bringing defeat to all the demonic forces. . . . [Jesus’ followers] understood and declared that *the ultimate significance of Jesus’ exorcisms was the defeat of Roman rule.*⁹

For Horsley, the approach of Empire Studies is equivalent to ‘anti-Roman,’ which leads to forced exegesis and strained conclusions for the events and intent of Jesus’ ministry. The same is true of Horsley’s interaction with texts in the Pauline corpus. He transforms 1 Corinthians into a document that promotes a rejection of the Roman imperial patronage and economic systems¹⁰ as a part of Paul’s goal to create an “anti-imperial alternative society.”¹¹

The ‘anti-imperial’ fixation among Horsley and other Empire Studies advocates obscures the interpretative options for a subject text when complicity is not entertained as an option. For some, then, the pursuit of Empire Studies has evolved from the question, ‘How does the biblical text *interact* with the Roman Empire?’ into ‘How does the biblical text *subvert* the Roman Empire?’ As a result, it is assumed that the biblical text intends to subvert the dominant

9 Ibid., 100, 102 [*emphasis added*].

10 Richard A. Horsley, “1 Corinthians: A Case Study of Paul’s Assembly as an Alternative Society,” in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg: Trinity, 1997), 242–252. Regarding Paul’s plea in 1 Corinthians against the patronage of Christians between him and Apollos, Horsley suggests that Paul “may have been [concerned] to prevent the assembly . . . from replicating the controlling and exploitative power relations of the dominant society” (p. 250), and therefore uses “his overall controlling vision of the ‘kingdom’ of God as a basis for rejecting the patronage system. . . .” (pp. 250–251). Kim, *Christ and Caesar*, 25–26 points out the oddity of this ‘anti-imperial’ conclusion, “In the face of the evidence in 1 Corinthians and elsewhere that Paul apparently enjoyed the patronage of Crispus, Gaius, Stephanas, Phoebe, Prisca and Aquila, and others for his mission in and around Corinth (1 Cor 1:14–16; 16:15–18; Rom 16:1–2; cf. also 2 Cor 11:9; Phil 1:5–7; 4:10–20; 1 Thess 5:12–13; Phlm), it is difficult to know how Horsley can argue that Paul tried to repudiate the patronage system of the Roman Empire.”

11 Richard A. Horsley, “General Introduction,” in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg: Trinity, 1997), 3.

society by “hitting a straight lick with a crooked stick,”¹² a shift leading to forced exegesis, awkward conclusions, and obscured assumptions.¹³

Uniquely, Empire Studies advocates *and* its opponents assume that Revelation is the quintessential example of ‘anti-imperial’ rhetoric.¹⁴ This assumption predisposes interpreters to view the Apocalypse as a book intent on the destruction of the Roman Empire through persistent challenges to the imperial claims of dominance, divine benefaction, and worldwide peace. This is not to suggest that this assumption is completely false, but rather, like the Empire Studies of Jesus and Paul described above, the eradication of the option of complicity opens interpreters up to significant exegetical pitfalls. In particular, through this ‘anti-imperial’ perspective, the goal of the book of Revelation becomes solely the destruction of the Roman Empire.¹⁵

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- 12 James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 153 quoting Zora Neale Hurston, “High John de Conquer,” in *Mother Wit*, edited by Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1973), 543.
 - 13 Neil Elliott wrestles with Romans 13 from the ‘anti-imperial’ perspective, which he says “appears a foreign body” in the Pauline corpus due to its “positive characterization of the ‘governing authorities.’” He then retorts, “Within the rhetorical structure of Romans, however, these remarks [Romans 13:1–7] have an important function: to encourage submission, *for now*, to the authorities, rather than desperate resistance...” [Neil Elliott, “Romans 13:1–7 in the Context of Imperial Propaganda,” in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg: Trinity, 1997), 203 (*emphasis added*)]. This is not to say that ‘anti-imperial’ elements do not exist in Romans 13, but when confronted with the possibility of complicity the option is readily dismissed. Conversely, Kim, *Christ and Caesar*, 42–43 suggests an equally forced conclusion, “From Rom 13:1–7 it is clear that Paul preferred the Roman order and justice, in spite of all their imperfection, to chaos and anarchy.” Kim suffers, then, from a similar fixation, in that, he cannot envision anything other than complicity; ‘anti-imperial’ elements are simply not an option.
 - 14 Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 132, “[Revelation] is ‘underground literature’; it speaks in code.... The encipherment is... a very clear and eloquent symbolization with which John snatches the masks off the lofty claims of Rome and shows its murderous aspect.” Similarly, Kim, *Christ and Caesar*, 21 (a strong opponent to Empire Studies) writes, “One has also to marvel that Paul was even more skillful in hiding (or expressing) his anti-imperial message in protective codes than the author of Revelation, who has carelessly left so many clues for cracking his codes.” See also Kim, *Christ and Caesar*, 34, 53; Horsley, “General,” 2.
 - 15 Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (HDR 9; Missoula: Scholars, 1976; repr., Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 186; idem, *Crisis & Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 47, 111, 124; J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), 21, 50; Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*:

An Alter-Imperial Response to Anti-Imperial Assumptions

This 'anti-imperial' approach limits the interpretative possibilities of the biblical text in that if the options do not appear 'anti-Roman' then the passages are either ignored or forced into 'anti-imperial' conclusions. An 'anti-imperial' perspective immediately positions the conversation as one of rebellion and resistance even when the text may not address the empire at all.¹⁶ Ironically, then, the pursuit to resurrect the marginalized voice in the text through an 'anti-imperial' slant actually marginalizes the voice of the text in that only 'anti-imperial' interpretations are tolerated.

While 'anti-imperial' elements may exist within a document, it is irresponsible to conclude that the entire document's *purpose* is to deconstruct the empire (i.e., an 'anti-imperial' document)—especially if complicit elements are found in the document. For example, Revelation consistently affirms the propaganda that the Roman Empire ruled the entire world¹⁷ (Rev 6:4, 15; 11:15; 13:2–3, 7–8, 12; 17:2, 5, 9, 18; 18:3, 24), but at the same time, Revelation denies Rome's claim that they are empowered by the gods of the Roman pantheon.¹⁸ Rather, Rome's power and dominance, in the Apocalypse, flow from the dragon and his two beasts (Rev 12:9, 12, 17; 13:1–2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 12; 17:3, 9) who are under the sovereignty of the one on the throne and the slain lamb (Rev 1:5a, 8; 4:8; 12:9b, 10–11, 13; 17:14, 16–17).¹⁹

In this example, while 'anti-imperial' elements are evident—in that Rome would not agree nor appreciate the redefinition of their source of power—the purpose of this depiction is to articulate the Alter-Imperial perspective that the sovereignty of God works through the domination of Rome to bring about his purposes, which is both complicit and resistant to the empire.²⁰ Therefore, 'anti-imperial' elements do not demand a purely destructive intent.

Reading Revelation in Ruins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 172, 208, 211; Leonard Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 191, 192.

16 While I do not find Kim's overall analysis compelling, his caution against frenetic 'anti-imperial' parallelomania in *Empire Studies* deserves consideration (pp. 28–33).

17 See chapter 3 below (pp. 83–91) for a discussion of Rome's message that: The Roman Empire is the ruler of the kings of the earth.

18 See chapter 3 below (pp. 91–95) for a discussion of Rome's message that: The Roman Empire is favored by the gods.

19 For more discussion, see Chapter 7 below.

20 In Revelation, Christians are depicted as victorious not when they overthrow or destroy Rome, but when they submit to death at the hands of Rome, like Jesus (see Rev 6:10–11; 12:11; 13:10; 14:13; 20:4–6; cf. Rev 11:3–12). For more discussion, see chapter 7 below.

As Homi Bhabha suggests, the ambivalent relationship between the subjects and the sovereigns of an empire must be respected and not reduced to the simplistic categories of rebellion or acquiescence. While some Empire Studies advocates begin their methodology with an 'anti-imperial' assumption,²¹ this monograph approaches the book of Revelation through the Alter-Imperial paradigm that allows resistance, complicity, both, or neither. Thus, the research question is not, 'How does Revelation *subvert* the Roman Empire?' but, 'How does Revelation *interact* with the Roman Empire?'

Methodological Weakness #2: Textual Assertions

In addition to an 'anti-imperial' assumption, the methodological approach of Empire Studies suffers, at times, from textual assertions and historical-contextual ambiguity. To demonstrate these final two methodological weaknesses, two imperial inquiries into the book of Revelation are examined: John Hurtgen's *Anti-Language in the Apocalypse of John* and Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther's *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now*.

Through socio-rhetorical models developed by Bruce Malina and others,²² Hurtgen's work intends to "analyze the language of the Apocalypse as an 'anti-language,' that is, a language that is antithetical to the norm society."²³ Similarly, Howard-Brook and Gwyther's work focuses on the interaction with

21 Richard A. Horsley, "Introduction—Jesus, Paul, and the 'Arts of Resistance': Leaves from the Notebook of James C. Scott," in *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; SemeiaSt 48; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 9. Using Horsley as a metonymy for the Empire Studies group as a whole, Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 2006), 13 states, "... the biblical text is read as unequivocal and exemplary anti-imperial and anti-colonial resistance literature."

22 John E. Hurtgen, *Anti-Language in the Apocalypse of John* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen Biblical, 1993) describes the socio-rhetorical model (chs. 1–3) followed by the implementation of the model on Rev 11:19–15:4 as a case study (ch. 4). Hurtgen, however, relies too heavily on Malina's work throughout. While it is understandable to depend on Malina for the 'kit-bash' methodology [developed from Mary Douglas's 'group and grid' model and Hayden White's 'metahistorical' model, used in Bruce J. Malina, *The Gospel of John in Sociolinguistic Perspective* (Berkley, Cali.: Center for Hermeneutical Studies, 1985)], Hurtgen does not directly engage Douglas and Hayden, but instead, allows Malina to define and describe the model, key terms, starting points, and conclusions without critical engagement with the model or the primary sources [so pp. 4, 9, 17, 18, 19, 28 (n. 44), 39, 52, 55].

23 Hurtgen, *Anti-Language*, 4–5.

imperial society, although they rely on historical analysis instead of socio-rhetorical models.²⁴ Both books, however, suffer from textual assertions that include, but are not limited to, [1] parallels without analysis and [2] biased sample selections.

Textual Assertions: Parallels without Analysis

A traditional pitfall of intertextual analysis is to place two texts side-by-side, observe a potential influence from one text to another, and then fail to discuss the implications of such an influence. For instance, Howard-Brook

24 At the outset, Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now* (Mary Knoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2003), xxiv call for an 'anti-imperial' approach to the book of Revelation. Howard-Brook and Gwyther, however, allow their (anti)imperial analysis to become distracted by their non-violent agenda throughout the book. In the introduction, the section entitled "Purpose of this Book" concludes with this statement, "Our reading of Revelation flows out of and deepens this commitment to nonviolent public witness as part of the task of faithful discipleship" (p. xxi). This non-violent agenda, then, usurps the discussion of apocalyptic literature in chapter 2 and transforms it into a comparison between the violent tendency of 1 Maccabees and the non-violent call in the book of Daniel (pp. 47–53). This non-violent trajectory climaxes in chapter 5 (entitled: "Revelation's Language of Violence and the Practice of a Discipleship of Nonviolence"), which contains the largest concentration of textual analysis on the Apocalypse. The two scrolls in Revelation 5 and 10 are contrasted, in that, according to Howard-Brook and Gwyther, the scroll of Revelation 5 presents a set of violent plagues (the seals and the trumpets) that fail to bring about repentance from rebellious humanity (Rev 9:20–21) while the scroll of Rev 10 offers two witnesses (Rev 11) that sacrifice their own bodies and receive God's vindication. From this contrived comparison (which ignores the relationship between the trumpets and bowls, the violence done to Christians in the seals [6:9–11], the fact that the seventh trumpet does not sound until after the two witnesses [11:15], and the concluding imagery of all three sets of plagues [8:4; 11:19; 16:18] that point back to the one on the throne in heaven [4:5] as sovereign over all of the plagues), Howard-Brook and Gwyther conclude, "[John] came to a startling but powerful understanding: *the death and resurrection of Jesus the Lamb revealed a change in God's plan* . . . In place of threats of violence, God would lead people to a change of heart by sending prophets . . . so filled with the Word of God that they would be willing to be killed rather than to refrain from witnessing publicly to that Word" (p. 150, *emphasis* theirs). Unfortunately, Howard-Brook and Gwyther do not show how this 'non-violent' approach to Revelation interacts with the agenda of Rome [see Mark Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace: A Nonviolent Christology in the Book of Revelation* (Waynesboro, Ga.: Paternoster, 2004)]. This historical comparison is ignored in favor of the theological perspective of 'non-violence' in Revelation. This is not to suggest that Revelation does not have a non-violent message to the reader (see chapter 7 below), only that the non-violent agenda of Howard-Brook and Gwyther distracts from their broad imperial analysis.

and Gwyther ask the question, ‘What texts influence Revelation’s imagery?’ (i.e., Old Testament, Non-Canonical, or Roman texts) but they fail to ask analysis questions like: What events caused the author of Revelation to be influenced by these specific texts? Why did the author of Revelation choose these voices to speak to his people? What kind of imperial interaction does this parallel indicate?

So in chapter seven, Howard-Brook and Gwyther present Roman liturgical connections to Revelation without discussion.²⁵ A comparison, for example, between the four living creatures of Revelation 4 and the four zodiacal creatures is offered as a possible parallel (that is loose at best),²⁶ but there is no analysis of the importance of such a parallel. The authors ignore important questions, such as: What is the significance of the four zodiacal creatures in the Roman Empire? What does the parallel indicate? Rebellion? Complicity? Both? Neither? Instead, the parallel is suggested without analysis, and therefore, offers little more than an intriguing observation.²⁷

Similarly, Hurtgen offers potential parallels between the text of Revelation and the socio-rhetorical categories of ‘anti-language’ to prove subversion in the Apocalypse. He defines ‘anti-language’ and its components as follows:

The anti-language is a language of social conflict—of passive resistance or active opposition . . . The communities of Revelation are seen as anti-society on the outside of the dominant social structure. This social place-

25 Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling*, 202–203, 204, 205.

26 *Ibid.*, 204.

27 In chapter two, Howard-Brook and Gwyther interject a lengthy discussion of the Zoroastrian influence on the bodily resurrection in Daniel and Revelation (pp. 72–75). This connection—an odd addition to a chapter ostensibly on apocalyptic literature—is not explored, however, to illustrate the imperial interaction within Revelation. This chapter progresses into what should have been a climactic section on the Jewish apocalyptic literature contemporary with Revelation (p. 77–81). Instead, the authors just offer “briefly a few of the most important texts from around the same time period as Revelation” with the goal “to show how much of the imagery flowing from these apocalyptic roots made its way into texts beyond Revelation itself” (p. 77). While this shows potential influence on the book of Revelation, it does not extend the observations into meaningful analysis with questions like: Why are these connections significant? What shared purpose do these images indicate? How do both books interact with the empire through these parallel images? Instead, the parallel stagnates. The rest of the chapter concludes with a cursory discussion of the ‘mini’ apocalypses in the synoptic Gospels to emphasize their non-violent agenda (pp. 81–82). Strangely, this section mentions no parallels to Revelation at all. See also Kraybill, *Apocalypse*, 99.

ment is indicated by the use of anti-language, which is characterized by “relexicalization” (new words for old words) and “overlexicalization” (multiple words for the same concept). Four practical functions of anti-language are (1) secrecy, (2) verbal play, (3) solidarity, and (4) alternative social and conceptual reality.²⁸

In addition to the ‘anti-imperial’ predisposition intrinsic to the model, Hurtgen attempts to prove the existence of ‘anti-language’ by merely labeling the text of Revelation with the key elements of the socio-rhetorical model—even if they do not fit or are not supported with viable evidence—and then avoids significant analysis.

For example, Hurtgen describes ‘secrecy’ as a key element of ‘anti-language’ in his definition above. To prove this point in the Apocalypse, Hurtgen cites Revelation 13:18 which calls for discernment to understand the cipher of 666.²⁹ After this clear example of secrecy, Hurtgen awkwardly asserts that the use of the passive voice in the book of Revelation is further evidence of ‘anti-language’ secrecy: “The verbal play of anti-language is seen in the repeated use of the passive voice, which occurs three times in the third tableau. The passive voice functions to inject an air of secrecy as well as to emphasize the acts of extra-historical agents in the development of the visions.”³⁰ Besides the fact that the mere use of the passive voice hardly qualifies as an act of intentional ‘secrecy,’ Hurtgen then fails to analyze this parallel. There is no discussion of ‘Why does Revelation need to use secrecy?’ or ‘How does this action subvert the empire?’ or ‘What are the imperial implications of the use of ciphers?’ The parallel stagnates as an intriguing possibility.

Also, Hurtgen categorizes the text of Revelation with the ‘anti-language’ elements ‘relexicalization’ and ‘overlexicalization’ without any explanation or discussion.³¹ For Revelation 13, Hurtgen proposes, “The beast from the sea is the Roman Empire relexicalized. The beast from the land is the Roman Empire relexicalized, though viewed from a different aspect, namely, emperor worship,

28 Hurtgen, *Anti-Language*, 1, 5.

29 Ibid., 117.

30 Ibid., 117 (cf. p. 102).

31 Ibid., 13.

which to Jew and Christian alike constituted the height of ungodliness.”³² No evidence or explanation is offered.³³

Notwithstanding the forced evidence, projects that surmise Revelation’s interaction with the empire and even subversion through ‘anti-language’ must extend the conversation of potential parallels to imperial implications. Indeed, parallels without analysis offer little more than intriguing observations. The authors above do not adequately address the question, ‘How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?’ by simply listing possible parallels. Significant analysis must follow to extrapolate the potential ramifications.

Textual Assertions: Biased Sample Selections

Another methodological weakness in Empire Studies is biased textual selections chosen for examination. At times the selected text(s) unfairly slants the evidence in the interpreter’s favor, or correspondingly, the texts that do not support the intended conclusion are conveniently ignored.

So Hurtgen’s choice of Revelation 11:19–15:4 for his socio-rhetorical ‘anti-language’ analysis is quite expedient, given that this is arguably the most widely recognized political section in the Apocalypse.³⁴ It would be more compelling if he used a politically benign section (Rev 1; 10:1–11:18; etc.) or even a theologically encumbered text (Rev 19:11–21; 20:1–10; etc.). Hurtgen’s selection of Revelation 11:19–15:4, however, appears to predispose the research in his favor.

32 Hurtgen, *Anti-Language*, 114. Hurtgen, *Anti-Language*, 96 asserts ‘overlexicalization’ without supporting evidence: “The ark of his covenant in his temple’ (ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ ναῷ αὐτοῦ) is an overlexicalized item which also indicates divine presence. Overlexicalization serves to reinforce the divine role as well as the solemnity of the situation.”

33 Hurtgen, *Anti-Language*, 99 compounds the oddity with ‘subversive’ relexicalization that does not appear resistant at all: “Jesus is relexicalized as ‘a male child.’” Similarly, Hurtgen, *Anti-Language*, 104 transforms common literary devices like puns, alliteration, and homonyms into seditious speech. With this definition, should all poetry be considered anti-language?

34 Hurtgen, *Anti-Language*, vii, 89. Hurtgen’s selection of Rev 11:19–15:4 is also quite peculiar in that he concludes: “I concur with Kempson that one finds a climactic section for his Vision 11 in the above section; but I find Fiorenza more convincing that Apocalypse of John 10:1–15:4 serves as ‘the climactic center of the action,’ for the section of early Christian prophecy presents the ‘prophetic interpretation of the political and religious situation of the community’” (pp. 94–95). If this is true, then why does he ignore Rev 10:1–11:18?

Concurrently, Howard-Brook and Gwyther avoid texts that are not overtly political. For example, besides the outline in the introduction,³⁵ Revelation 20 is never mentioned again throughout the entire book. It is true that Revelation 20 is notoriously difficult due to theological baggage. Nevertheless, if John attempts to ‘unveil the empire,’ then it would seem that at this climactic moment in the narrative—in which Satan, the key antagonist, is bound and imprisoned (20:1–3), the faithful reign with Christ 1,000 years (20:4–6), after which Satan is released (20:3b, 7–9a) and then defeated with fire from heaven (20:9b–10)—Revelation 20 would have something to contribute to the imperial conversation.³⁶ Howard-Brook and Gwyther, however, choose not to engage such texts, but instead, ignore them in their discussions and conclusions. Therefore, like Hurtgen, the selection of texts seems to predispose the research in their favor. If, however, Revelation’s interaction with the Roman Empire is to be adequately explored, then even the most obscure passages must be considered for the overall portrait painted in the Apocalypse.

An Alter-Imperial Response to Textual Assertions

Methodologies that offer parallels without analysis from biased passages are inadequate to answer the question, ‘How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?’ Like the ‘anti-imperial’ assumption above, the goal of Empire Studies is not to prove the existence of sedition but to allow the subject’s voice in the text to be heard on its own terms, whether subversive or acquiescent.

As a result, this monograph implements the Alter-Imperial paradigm on Revelation 20:7–10 as a case study for the paradigm’s effectiveness on Revelation as a whole. Although it appears at a climactic moment in the Apocalypse, this text is a markedly uncharacteristic passage for imperial inquiry and is traditionally consigned to theological debates over the millennium. Thus, the Alter-Imperial paradigm is not tested through research predisposed to its imperial trajectory but the opposite.

However, a lucid interpretation of an obscure text through imperial parallels does not adequately address the stated research question. Further analysis is necessary. Therefore, this monograph concludes (chapter 7) with an analysis of the Alter-Imperial interpretation of Revelation 20:7–10 (chapter 6)

35 Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling*, xxvi.

36 Rev 20:7–10 is typically denied significant investigation in Revelation scholarship. At times, it is acknowledged but not analyzed (Friesen, *Imperial*, 159–160; Collins, *Combat Myth*, 225–226; Ford, *Revelation*, 355–357), retold but not explained (Kraybill, *Apocalypse*, 165; Friesen, *Imperial*, 159–161, 188), or completely ignored (Collins, *Crisis*, 150; Kraybill, *Apocalypse*, 24).

to encourage and temper further imperial explorations in the Apocalypse and beyond.

Methodological Weakness #3: Historical-Contextual Ambiguity

A central element to Empire Studies is socio-historical context. The imperial message of the dominant elite functions as an interpretative link with the text of the dominated non-elite. It is essential, therefore, to clearly describe the Roman imperial context concurrent with the subject text's composition. Yet, both Hurtgen and Howard-Brook/Gwyther suffer from historical-contextual ambiguity that weakens their imperial conclusions about Revelation.

After stating the sociolinguistic purpose of his work, Hurtgen touts, "What makes the study interesting for this writer is viewing the Apocalypse of John in terms of the verbal contest and verbal display (relexicalization and overlexicalization) that surfaces in the language of the *oppressed* Christians."³⁷ Hurtgen's examination, however, never discusses the language of the *oppressor*. If 'anti-language' constitutes a response from the mouths of the 'oppressed,' then it is essential to delineate the voice of the oppressor, which gives access to the 'language' that is to be opposed.

Nevertheless, throughout his short discussion of the socio-historical setting of Revelation, key elements of imperial interaction in the text are either ignored or consigned to brief assertions in the footnotes.³⁸ For example, the type of persecution experienced,³⁹ the identity of the key symbols of political dominance in Revelation 13 (the two beasts),⁴⁰ and the potential parallel to the Nero *redivivus* myth in Revelation 13⁴¹—all three of which are major components to his selected text (Rev 11:19–15:4)—are not discussed. Instead, sources

37 Hurtgen, *Anti-Language*, 14 [*emphasis added*].

38 While Hurtgen's table of contents suggests that the section on the "social location of thought" stretches from pages 17–50, the information regarding the *realia* of Revelation is handled only on pages 19–26. The rest of the chapter discusses sociological models and methodologies.

39 Hurtgen, *Anti-Language*, 48 (n. 117) asserts that he does not have to conclude what type of persecution actually occurred and then offers no explanation as to why this is the case.

40 Hurtgen, *Anti-Language*, 107 (n. 36), "The history of interpretation of the first beast (13:1–10), as well the 'other beast' (13:11–18), is long and complex. . . I have followed the majority of commentators who identify the beast from the sea with the Roman Empire . . ."

41 Hurtgen, *Anti-Language*, 107 (n. 36), "Collins, *Revelation*, pp. 59–64, has clearly laid out the four basic positions concerning the identity of the wounded and healed head of the beast from the sea and concluded that the latter referred to Nero and the *Nero redivivus* myth . . ."

that engage these topics germane to Hurtgen's analysis are listed in the footnotes. This vague picture of the "dominant and oppressive Roman Empire"⁴² is then assumed throughout the rest of his analysis in statements like, "John, the seer and hearer, was convinced that 'talking back,' often in secretive ways (e.g., numeration), was the best way to respond to the dominant culture."⁴³ Such nebulous predications simply beg the question: To what/whom is John 'talking back'? In other words, the existence of 'anti-language' within a text necessitates an opposing voice that the oppressed community confronts. What Hurtgen provides is a socio-linguistic model without a context.

A similar oddity is found in Howard-Brook and Gwyther's disregard for the date of Revelation's composition. In the introduction to the book, preliminary issues are addressed, including Revelation's structure⁴⁴ and author,⁴⁵ but curiously the date is completely ignored.⁴⁶ Even in chapter three, dedicated to the historical context of the Apocalypse, a discussion on the date of Revelation is absent. In spite of their stated goal to investigate "how Rome constructed this coherent and ordered view and the reality it sought to mask," it is difficult to construct the historical context of any text without a general date from which to begin.⁴⁷ This overlooks significant historical questions like: Are the agendas of Augustus the same as Caligula? Does the propaganda (the 'mask') of Claudius carry the same emphases as Nero? If so, what are the common images and slogans? If not, what has shifted? Moreover, did the propaganda shift or stay the same when the Flavian dynasty replaced the Julio-Claudian line? Thus, if a date is not established for a subject text, analysis of imperial

42 Ibid., 113.

43 Ibid., 139 (cf. p. 106). Also, Hurtgen, *Anti-Language*, 122 (n. 58) states, "I concur with Fiorenza, however, that symbols of the fourth tableau are a 'fitting response to the social-historical-political situation faced by the Christians of Asia Minor' (p. 123)." In what ways are they a "fitting response"? What are they responding to? What was the social-historical-political situation that the Christians in Asia Minor faced? Hurtgen scarcely raises, much less addresses, such questions.

44 Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling*, xxv–xxvi.

45 Ibid., xxvi–xxviii.

46 The only mention of the dating of Revelation is in two paragraphs that stretch from pp. 117–118. In this description, the authors do not take a stance on the issue; instead, they simply say that some have moved away from the date of Revelation as the time of Domitian.

47 Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling*, 89.

interaction is greatly hindered due to the complex contours of historical contexts in the empire.⁴⁸

An Alter-Imperial Response to the Historical-Contextual Ambiguity

Approaches to the Apocalypse that seek to answer the question, 'How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?' must offer a clear depiction of the socio-historical setting of the empire at the time of Revelation's composition. If the sovereign's voice is ignored, then the subject's voice distorts in our modern ears when they speak about the empire. So if Revelation uses imagery from the empire to compose its message, then the imperial imagery must be analyzed to understand its function in the text. Otherwise, our examination relies on assumptions, assertions, and ambiguities of the historical context that weaken our conclusions.

At this point, three methodological weaknesses of Empire Studies have been identified: [1] 'anti-imperial' assumptions, [2] textual assertions, and [3] historical-contextual ambiguity. These three deficiencies are obstacles that must be overcome in order to answer the question, 'How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?' The Alter-Imperial paradigm addresses these vulnerabilities of Empire Studies and offers a way forward.

The Alter-Imperial Paradigm

Similar to Postcolonial criticism, the goal of this present work is to resurrect the voice of the marginalized author of Revelation (cf. Rev 1:9) who writes to a community of churches in Asia Minor (Rev 2:1–3:22) in search of their suppressed identity on the ideological fringes of society.⁴⁹ In light of the observations of dominance from Homi Bhabha and James C. Scott, this monograph constructs an Alter-Imperial paradigm that allows for elements of subversion, acquiescence, both, or neither in the subject text. Avoiding the pitfalls of 'anti-

48 As Collins, *Crisis*, 50 (cf. p. 54) urges, "Since Revelation is so greatly oriented toward social and political matters, it is absolutely essential that it be dated as precisely as possible. Otherwise, the allusions to its situation might be seriously misinterpreted and its purpose misunderstood." Cf. Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 403.

49 For texts that refer to identity (and a potential identity crisis) for the churches in Asia Minor, see: Rev 1:5b–6, 9, 20; 2:2–3, 4–5, 9, 13, 14–15, 19, 20; 3:1–2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 15–17; 5:10; 6:17; 7:4–8; 11:1–2; 12:11, 12, 17; 13:7, 10; 14:1–5, 7, 9–12, 13; 17:6; 18:4; 19:7–8, 9; 20:4–6; 21:3, 8, 9–27; 22:9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18–19.

imperial' assumptions, textual assertions, and historical-contextual ambiguity, the Alter-Imperial paradigm intends to answer the question, 'How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?' through the construction of [1] the sovereign narrative of the Roman Empire and [2] 'points of conversation' in the subject narrative.

The Construction of the Sovereign Narrative of the Roman Empire

As stated above, socio-historical context is an essential element for imperial inquiries. Without a clear depiction of the sovereigns of society, the interaction of the subjects with the empire becomes distorted. Therefore, the Roman imperial propaganda preceding and contemporary with the book of Revelation needs careful articulation.

Building on the diagram in Appendix A that depicts James C. Scott's analysis of domination and resistance,⁵⁰ Appendix B adds two key elements that are not explicit in the works of Scott or Bhabha: the 'sovereign narrative' and the 'subject narrative.'⁵¹ Defined in this context, the term 'narrative' is the ideology that articulates 'how the world should be.' That is to say, the sovereign narrative is the ideology of 'how the world should be' from the dominant perspective, which is implemented in the public transcript through imperial propaganda (static and enacted)⁵² and the threat of violence.⁵³ The subject narrative, then, is the ideology of 'how the world should be' from the dominated perspective, which is occasionally (but not necessarily) communicated in the public transcript in subtle ways but more freely articulated in the social space of the subject's hidden transcript.

As Appendix B shows, the sovereign narrative dominates the public transcript. This ideology is performed by both the sovereign(s) and the subject(s); it reiterates their identities in the third space as superior and inferior, respectively. To establish the socio-historical context for the time of the subject text's composition is to disclose the content of the empire's sovereign narrative. This reveals the ideology with which the subject narrative dialogues.⁵⁴

50 See p. 245.

51 See p. 246.

52 For definitions and examples of 'Static Propaganda' and 'Enacted Propaganda,' see chapter 3 below on pp. 80–83.

53 For a similar observation, see the description of the "imperial discourse" in Friesen, *Imperial*, 17, 18, 53. Cf. Anatheia E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 12.

54 In critique of James C. Scott, Timothy J. Lukes, "Book Review: *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* by James C. Scott," *APSR* 85.4 (1991): 1455 cautions, "Without an identifiable source of domination, the hidden transcript can become inchoate and

In part two of this monograph, the three chapters focus on the socio-historical context of the book of Revelation. First, the Roman sovereign narrative is constructed through the imagery found in the static and enacted propaganda that saturates the public transcript from Augustus onward.⁵⁵ From this broad view of the Roman Empire, the book of Revelation's date is established through external and internal evidence to provide a more precise target of historical investigation.⁵⁶ In the final chapter of section two, the socio-historical context is constructed from this date.⁵⁷ These elements position the text of Revelation in a setting that allows interaction with the empire to be seen more clearly.

'Points of Conversation' in the Subject Narrative

The goal of this present work, however, is not merely to construct the imperial context of the Apocalypse. Rather, the socio-historical context is simply the means by which the text of Revelation can be probed to address the question, 'How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?' This interaction is channeled through 'points of conversation' in the subject narrative.

As Appendix B depicts, the sovereign narrative bypasses the dominant's hidden transcript and dictates the machinations of the public transcript. Conversely, the subject's hidden transcript, at times, intentionally penetrates the porous public transcript to appear on the public stage in veiled ways. More importantly for the purpose of this monograph, the subject hidden transcript is in persistent dialogue with the subject narrative ('how the world should be' from the dominated perspective).⁵⁸

Appendix C reorganizes the conversation with a more focused agenda on the question: What contributes to the dynamics of the subject narrative?⁵⁹ The

incoherent." See also Marie Marmo Mullaney, "Book Review: *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* by James C. Scott," *JMH* 65.3 (1993): 579–581.

55 See Chapter 3: The Sovereign Narrative of the Roman Empire.

56 See Chapter 4: The Date of the Book of Revelation pt. 1: The External and Internal Evidence.

57 See Chapter 5: The Date of the Book of Revelation pt. 2: The Socio-Historical Context of the Flavian Dynasty.

58 Neither Scott nor Bhabha point this out explicitly. While it may be a simple nuance, the existence of an underlying ideology fueling the hidden transcripts (or mimicries) should be examined with more acumen. Like the sovereign narrative, the context and content of the subject narrative will greatly advance the overall discussion of how the subject interacts with the sovereign.

59 While the depiction is original to this monograph, the ideas are implicitly found in Bhabha and, more visibly, in Scott.

subject narrative is developed and articulated through two key areas of influence: 'subject traditions' and 'points of conversation.' 'Subject traditions' refer to the common beliefs, myths, and lore indigenous to the subjects. Regarding the book of Revelation, the 'subject traditions' would refer to the Jewish literature that fuels a large portion of the imagery in the book of Revelation.⁶⁰

The 'points of conversation,' though, refer to elements from the sovereign narrative that are selected in the articulation of the subject narrative.⁶¹ That is to say, 'points of conversation' for the subject narrative (used for complicit or rebellious ends) are *initially* offered by the dominant as a way to communicate their sovereign narrative in the public transcript through the use of static and enacted propaganda. Nevertheless, this propaganda not only communicates the sovereign narrative, but is recast as key symbols for the subject narrative exploiting the grammar and imagery already familiar in imperial discourse in the public transcript. The 'points of conversation,' then, are the expressions of the sovereign narrative that ring loudest in the subject's ears.⁶²

It is in these 'points of conversation' where an answer, on some level, can be found to the question, 'How does the subject text interact with the empire?' Is the sovereign narrative gladly accepted and incorporated? Is it rejected outright? Is there a conflation of both acquiescence and subversion?⁶³ In other words, how does the subject narrative utilize the 'points of conversation' from the sovereign narrative in its subject text?

In part three, the 'points of conversation' that surface in the socio-historical context of part two are used as a lens to view the book of Revelation from an

60 As could be inferred, the Old Testament intertextual explorations in Revelation (described above) play a significant role here. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 170, 180 (n. 47).

61 As could be inferred, the historical inquiries and sociological investigations in Revelation (described above) play a significant role here.

62 Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (trans. Lionel R.M. Strachan; New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1908; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 340, 341; Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 14, 114. As Collins, *Combat Myth*, 57 quips, "Although the book of Revelation is presented as a heavenly letter, its imagery did not simply fall out of the sky." See also Laura Salah Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture: The Second-Century Church Amid the Spaces of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 7; Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 107.

63 Although Scott, *Domination*, xii, asserts that "every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a 'hidden transcript' that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant. . .," this monograph does not assume that "every subordinate group" creates a hidden transcript nor that what is created is "a critique of power."

Alter-Imperial perspective. More specifically, Revelation 20:7–10 functions as a case study to see if ‘points of conversation’ can offer a more lucid interpretation to a notoriously difficult text.⁶⁴ The final chapter analyzes both this interpretation and the Alter-Imperial paradigm to directly address the question: How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?⁶⁵

64 See Chapter 6: An Alter-Imperial Interpretation of Revelation 20:7–10.

65 See Chapter 7: The Alter-Imperial Paradigm: Revelation and Empire Studies.

PART 2

*The Construction of the
Sovereign Narrative and Points of Conversation*



The Sovereign Narrative of the Roman Empire

The sovereign narrative dominates the public transcript. The ideological agenda of the elite floods the public forum and consistently articulates from their perspective ‘how the world should be.’ From city streets to country roads, from common markets to local theaters, from elaborate buildings to mundane cooking utensils, the Roman world was saturated with imperial propaganda. The Roman Empire understood that every item (coins, weapons, altars, etc.) and every encounter (funerals, festivals, triumphs, etc.) was an opportunity to communicate the sovereign narrative—a weapon more powerful to control their subjects than any potent army.¹ The imagery that decorated the empire, then, was not merely an occasion for beautification, but instead, it was an essential articulation of the sovereign narrative so that even the “unlettered viewer could hardly fail to grasp the message.”²

- 1 Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century AD to the Third* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 1–3 suggests the Roman army was not vastly superior in war tactics or weaponry; instead, the “more subtle order” of complex “ideas and traditions” offered the Roman army a more ideological or “political purpose”—more “psychological” and “not physical.” Although Luttwak’s view of a ‘grand strategy’ for the Roman army is debated [so Martin Goodman, *The Roman World: 44 BC–AD 180* (London: Routledge, 1997), 83 and 105], many scholars agree that psychological weapons (e.g., ‘fear’) were the most powerful tools of the Roman Empire [Susan P. Mattern, *Rome and the Enemy: Imperial Strategy in the Principate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 22, 115–116]. See also William V. Harris, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome, 327–70 BC* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 50–53; Anthea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 12; Laura Salah Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture: The Second-Century Church Amid the Spaces of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 11–12.
- 2 Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (trans. Alan Shapiro; Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 312. John Elsner, “Cult and Scripture: Sacrifice in the Ara Pacis Augustae,” *JRS* 81 (1991): 51 critiques Zanker for presenting the “Augustan art as the state might ideally have wished it to be viewed,” which “deprives art of any subversive or conflictive viewings.” From the perspective of the die-engraver or sculptor, Elsner’s critique is justified. Zanker’s contribution, however, centers on the function of the images in the public transcript. For a position commensurate to Zanker, see Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (trans. Lionel R.M. Strachan; New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1908; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 10.

This chapter summarizes the sovereign narrative of Rome communicated through the images of the empire. The images of the sovereign narrative develop a grammar through which subjects of the empire can speak—whether positively or negatively.³ Regarding the sovereign narrative, both ‘what’ was

- 3 *Contra* Paul Veyne, “Lisibilité des images, propaganda et appareil monarchique dans l’Empire romain,” *RevH* 304.1 (2002): 3–30. Veyne distinguishes between ‘propaganda’ and ‘pomp.’ Propaganda is only used when an insecure monarchy needs to convince its subjects of its legitimacy. Rome, so Veyne suggests, was not in this position, and therefore, the imagery should be seen as ‘pomp’ (a neutral beautification of the empire). As Veyne writes, “L’apparat, lui, ne vise pas à conquérir les esprits, car les sujets du roi sont déjà convaincus de la légitimité de leur maître ou présumés l’être: on ne suppose pas un instant qu’ils puissent en douter. Un consensus monarchique bien établi n’a pas besoin de propagande . . . On fait de la propagande *afin* de devenir dictateur ou de le rester, tandis que l’apparat est déployé *parce qu’on* est le roi” (p. 23). Rome did not need propaganda since they enjoyed a “well-established monarchical consensus,” and therefore the empire was decorated with just “pomp.” Veyne’s primary evidence, Trajan’s Column (113 CE) north of the Roman Forum, contains ‘non-visible’ imagery incapable of influencing passersby. Thus, Veyne writes, “Cette indifférence [of the visibility of the imagery on the relief] s’explique bien simplement: le décor de la colonne est une expression d’apparat impérial et non une information de propagande communiquée au spectateur” (p. 9). Veyne deduces from this “indifference” a wide conclusion for all Roman imagery, in that “le cas de la Trajane serait plutôt la règle que l’exception” (p. 10). Regarding imagery on patriotic cakes given to the *plebs* after public sacrifices, Veyne writes, “Cette imagerie monarchiste et patriotique faisait peu d’effet sur la population, pour la simple raison que cette population était convaincue d’avance et en même temps parce que cette même population n’y croyait pas. En effet, les sujets du prince aimaient leur souverain . . . ce n’était pas là un sentiment d’élection, mais un sentiment induit par la relation de dépendance” (p. 20). So, whenever Veyne engages visible imagery in Rome (e.g., imperial coinage), he either dismisses their potential as propaganda as anachronistic (pp. 16–17) or he calls them exceptions to the rule [e.g., coins under Vespasian and Domitian (p. 17, n. 64 and 65) or Augustus imagery as a whole (pp. 26–27)]. Three points are made in response. First, Veyne’s analysis begins with a false dichotomy fueled by poor definitions of ‘pomp’ and ‘propaganda.’ The two options for imperial imagery are not either [1] forcefully coercive imagery due to imperial insecurity (Veyne’s ‘propaganda’) or [2] an expression of acceptance and love for the sovereign under whose reign you joyfully submit (Veyne’s ‘pomp’). While on some level propaganda does desire a response, the viewer’s disposition determines the imagery’s intent. If the viewer is recalcitrant, then the imagery calls for repentance; if the viewer is complicit, then the imagery contributes to their edification. In addition, this completely ignores questions like: Why would Rome choose the imagery they chose?; Was the imagery completely random in its implementation?; Why do patterns in the imagery (e.g., on coins) reappear yet differ in emphasis and implementation from reign to reign?; etc. Second, Veyne’s analysis both assumes and concludes that every person in the Roman Empire (sovereign or subject) agreed with the imagery’s message, ignoring the possibility (and historical evidence) of any dissident voices. Although Homi Bhabha and James C. Scott

articulated and ‘how’ it was articulated offer a lucid picture of the world asserted by the Roman elite, which inadvertently developed ‘points of conversation’ for the subject narrative.

The Means of Communication: Key Elements of the Sovereign Narrative in the Public Transcript

In order for every subject of the empire, educated and uneducated, to be able to grasp the sovereign narrative,⁴ two key components must exist: [1] locations of intersection and [2] imperial billboards.⁵ The goal is to saturate the subjects with effective means of communication at multiple locations of frequent intersection—for repetition is a powerful ideological weapon.⁶ It is no accident, then, when images of the sovereign narrative are found in the architecture of

(described above) would reject this assumption, the existence of resistance literature—like the Qumran War Scroll (1QM and 4Q491–497) and 2 Esdras (esp. 10:60–12:35)—and violent revolutions (like the Jews of 66–73 CE) suggest that the population had not “been already convinced” of the message in Rome’s “monarchical and patriotic imagery.” Indeed, as this present work intends to show, the evidence of ‘points of conversation’ from the sovereign narrative in subject narrative texts indicates that, despite Veyne’s claims, Rome’s imagery was interpreted by some as not merely ‘pomp’ but as a competing message that deserved to be addressed. Third, the existence of imperial imagery on structures not readily visible does not necessitate the complete eradication of the imagery’s impact when it is clearly visible. In fact, the presence of the imperial imagery in non-visible locations is itself evidence of the successful effect of the imagery in the visible locations, in that when engaging the empire (whether complicit or rebellious) out of the empire’s direct visibility, the subjects know what language to use. In other words, the visible imperial imagery develops the language to engage the empire (whether complicit or rebellious). The non-visible imagery, then, communicates the imperial propaganda’s complete saturation of the Roman world: both seen and unseen. Cf. Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 2, 14, 161, 171; Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 63.

4 This does not mean that they must agree with the sovereign narrative—just understand what is being articulated.

5 ‘Imperial billboards’ are the various means of communication for the elites to speak to their subjects: numismatics, inscriptions, mosaics, frescoes, temples, historical texts, myths, etc.

6 Zanker, *Power*, 112–113; Leonard Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 177. For the pervasiveness of the imperial cult in particular, see Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 75, 120; idem, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 69.

the bath house,⁷ on the curtain of the theater,⁸ on the statues littering the public Forum,⁹ or even on pillars along the roads between cities “set up every mile to proclaim in big letters to whom it was owed.”¹⁰ At the busiest intersections of life,¹¹ imperial billboards constantly communicate the sovereign narrative.

Imperial Billboards

Various modes of communication are necessary if both the educated and uneducated subjects of the empire are to grasp the sovereign message. The Roman Empire utilized both *static propaganda* (e.g., coins, altars, statues) and *enacted propaganda* (e.g., rituals, processions, ceremonies). Static propaganda has the advantage of longevity—in that enacted propaganda only lasts as long as the experience or the memory of the experience unless it is converted to static propaganda—but the distinct disadvantage of ‘marketing space’ constraints. More specifically, the space allotted for an inscription or the size of the coin minted limits the length of the propaganda. Thus, static propaganda is a carefully thought out articulation by the patron.¹²

The power of static propaganda, however, should not be minimized due to its space limitations, for without fail these objects prove quite influential. For example, coins in the ancient world developed into a significant medium for the sovereign narrative.¹³ Coins isolate easily recognizable symbols to communicate achievements (buildings, military victories, political positions), divine

7 See Peter Scherrer, ed., *Ephesus: The New Guide* (trans. Lionel Bier and George M. Luxon; Turkey: Efes Müzesi Selçuk, 2000), 118–121; Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 31–32; Friesen, *Imperial*, 72.

8 Zanker, *Power*, 326; Richard Alston, *Aspects of Roman History AD 14–117* (London: Routledge, 1998), 222.

9 Alston, *Aspects*, 222.

10 Zanker, *Power*, 328.

11 ‘Locations of intersection’ should not be constrained to geography; they are also found in coins, cups, and religious items.

12 Mattern, *Rome*, 162. Regarding statuary, see Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 5, 213; Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 82.

13 C.H.V. Sutherland, “The Historical Evidence of Greek and Roman Coins,” *GR* 9.26 (1940): 75; Michael Grant, *The World of Rome: The History of the Roman Empire from 133 BC to AD 217* (London: Phoenix, 1960), 49. For the use of imperial coinage in Seleucid propaganda, see Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 51–52. For a contrasting perspective on numismatics and propaganda, see T.V. Buttrey, “Vespasian as Moneyer,” *NumC* (1972): 89–109.

favor (images of gods, actions of gods, captions), and essential propaganda (events of the past, visions of the future, key words, depictions of the ruler).¹⁴

Imperial control of a coin's production emphasizes the importance of coinage for imperial propaganda. Under Augustus, a significant portion of the coinage was brought under the direct control of the emperor, apart from the Senate. As C.H.V. Sutherland points out, "propaganda was now to be as important a function of coinage as its very economic activity."¹⁵ Production was controlled by the state and "not the result of chance selection, or of a die-engraver's roaming, unfettered fancy."¹⁶

In addition, the frequent changes of captions and images indicate the imperial perception of the coin's influence. As Shelagh M. Bond writes:

We can only assume from the way in which successive emperors caused a multiplicity of types to be struck on their coins, changing with the greatest frequency, that the Romans and provincials looked at them far more attentively than we look at our coin types today. In fact the population of the Empire clearly expected to find in their coinage the kind of interest and information that modern readers find in newspapers and periodicals. . . . The fact that the coin types were changed so often, and were used to convey quite complicated concepts relating to the imperial house, convinces us that this method of publicity met a demand and was eminently successful.¹⁷

Wide circulation of coins across the empire¹⁸ transformed this economic mechanism into a potent imperial billboard that grandly announced the

14 Shelagh M. Bond, "The Coinage of the Early Roman Empire," *GR* 4.2 (1957): 149–150; J.M.C. Toynbee, "The 'Ara Pacis Augustae,'" *JRS* 51 (1961): 154. Grant, *World*, 239–240 points out, "No modern dictator distributes photographs of himself so thoroughly as the rulers of the Roman empire circulated theirs; their portraits reached millions (who could see their ruler in no other medium, except the coinage). . . so that the portraits on these coins had their share of the veneration accorded to imperial statues."

15 Sutherland, "Historical Evidence," 72. See also Bond, "Coinage," 151; Paul Petit, *Pax Romana* (trans. James Willis; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 88–89.

16 Sutherland, "Historical Evidence," 65–66.

17 Bond, "Coinage," 150. Cf. Veyne, "Lisibilité," 16–17.

18 Carlos F. Noreña, "Medium and Message in Vespasian's Templum Pacis," *MAAR* 48 (2003): 29; Petit, *Pax*, 88–89.

inauguration of new imperial dynasties¹⁹ and even mundanely influenced people's hairstyles in Northwest Britain.²⁰

Space limitations do not diminish the power of static propaganda in the slightest; these imperial billboards become a succinct and pervasive method of immersing the subjects in the sovereign narrative. From tableware in Boscoreale,²¹ to household shrines in exile,²² to tombstones in Britain,²³ to Roman buildings across the empire,²⁴ static propaganda was a considerable weapon for imperial propaganda.

Similarly, enacted propaganda proved quite useful as an imperial billboard. The avenues of enacted propaganda ranged from funeral processions,²⁵ to public games,²⁶ to annual sacrifices at the Ara Pacis Augustae altar on the Campus Martius, to the magnificent display of a Roman triumphal procession.²⁷ The power of enacted propaganda is the ability to not just present the imperial imagery to the viewer but to provide an avenue in which the subject may actually participate in the propaganda. The goal moves beyond the visual impact found in the static propaganda. As Velleius Paterculus declares, enacted propaganda intends to fill "the minds and eyes of the Roman people with the magnificent spectacle" saturated with unforgettable images.²⁸ Enacted propaganda allows the subjects to participate in the sovereign narrative and not merely observe. To the subjects, then, an active role is offered in the narrative's progression and to the dominant, a powerful weapon to perpetuate it.²⁹

The static and enacted propaganda develop a setting in which the sovereign narrative is constantly present. Direct and indirect, subtle and blatant, the

19 Bond, "Coinage," 153.

20 Keith Branigan, "Images—Or Mirages—of Empire? An Archaeological Approach to the Problem," in *Images of Empire* (ed. Loveday Alexander; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1991), 97.

21 Zanker, *Power*, 266, 272.

22 Ovid, *Pont.* 2.8.1ff.

23 Branigan, "Images," 97.

24 Petit, *Pax*, 240.

25 Dio Cass. 56.34.2.

26 Suet., *Aug.* 43. See Diana E.E. Kleiner and Bridget Buxton, "Pledges of Empire: The Ara Pacis and the Donations of Rome," *AJA* 112.1 (2008): 61; Elizabeth Hazelton Haight, "Reconstruction in the Augustan Age," *CJ* 17.7 (1922): 367.

27 For rituals in general, see Friesen, *Imperial*, 7; Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 198.

28 Vell. Pat. 2.100.2 (Shipley, LCL).

29 As Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 162 notes, "[Military parades in the Greco-Roman world] were also crafted displays of power meant to stir the emotions of their participants and spectators, creating and manipulating a sense of collective identity mixed with awe and fear of the conquering empire" (see also p. 198).

imperial billboards of the empire communicate to the educated and the uneducated the imperial perspective of 'how the world should be,' a sovereign narrative that can still be heard today through the remains of the Roman world.

The Sovereign Narrative of Rome: Three Related Messages

In what follows, both static and enacted propaganda articulate Rome's sovereign narrative that proclaimed three related messages: [1] The Roman Empire is the ruler of the kings of the earth; [2] The Roman Empire is favored by the gods; and [3] The Roman Empire is the bearer of *Pax*. While traces of each message can be found throughout the Republic, the following investigation centers on its articulation in the time of Augustus with especially pertinent inflections in the first century CE.³⁰

Message #1: The Roman Empire is the Ruler of the Kings of the Earth

War is the father of all and king of all.
Some . . . he makes slaves, others free.
[Heraclitus of Ephesus]³¹

Already in the 2nd century BCE, Polybius declares, "For who is so worthless or indolent as not to wish to know by what means and under what system of polity the Romans in less than fifty-three years have succeeded in subjecting nearly the whole inhabited world (οἰκουμένην) to their sole government—a thing unique in history?"³² Shortly thereafter, Pompey's triumph included a "trophy of the whole world (οἰκουμένης)"³³ and Cicero referred to Caesar as

30 This assumes that Augustus is the sovereign narrative's primary architect replicated throughout the first century Roman world. This is not to suggest, however, that the articulation of the sovereign narrative stopped at the end of the first century, but regarding the study of the book of Revelation, the time period from Augustus to Domitian is most directly relevant. Therefore, emperors that follow the Flavians will be referenced periodically, but they will not be a central focus.

31 Quoted in Keith Bradley, "On Captives under the Principate," *Phoenix* 58.3 (2004): 298.

32 Polyb. 1.1.5 (Paton, LCL). See also 15.9.5.

33 Dio Cass. 37.21.2.

“master of the whole world.”³⁴ Therefore, it is not surprising to find the first message—The Roman Empire is the ruler of the kings of the earth—embedded in the sovereign narrative of Augustus. What is surprising, though, is the marked intensification of this message in Augustan propaganda.³⁵

Leading up to the reign of Augustus, the Roman Empire was caught in self-destructive struggles for power. The death of Julius Caesar in 44 BCE led to thirteen years of instability filled with media wars³⁶ and physical wars³⁷ that resulted in the final standoff between Octavian and Mark Antony at the Battle of Actium in September of 31 BCE. These events left the Roman world “weary of crime, civil war, and bloodshed”³⁸ and desperate for stability.

Having assumed power after the Battle of Actium, Augustus immediately began to employ both static and enacted propaganda to erase the past and prepare the world for the future under his reign. The Battle of Actium was transformed from the zenith of civil wars where Romans were killing Romans³⁹ into a majestic victory over a barbarian foreign leader trying to overthrow the glory of Rome.⁴⁰ Therefore, the propaganda heralded the reign of Augustus as the establishment of security in the empire and Rome’s supreme reign over the rulers of the whole world.

The massive funerary inscription known as the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*—written by Augustus himself, entrusted to the vestal Virgins, inscribed on bronze tablets and put at the entrance of his mausoleum on the Campus Martius in Rome⁴¹—commences with this heading: “Below is a copy of the acts of the Deified Augustus by which he placed the whole world (*orbem terrarum*) under

34 Cicero, *Off.* 3.21.83 (Miller, LCL). See C. Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politics in the Early Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 37–41.

35 Gary Gilbert, “The List of Nations in Acts 2: Roman Propaganda and the Lukan Response,” *JBL* 121.3 (2002): 511.

36 Goodman, *Roman*, 37 states, “Octavian in 32 BC began to portray Antonius as essentially un-Roman, a slave to his oriental mistress, and an incompetent drunkard.” Octavian reinterpreted Antony’s alliance with Cleopatra, his Egyptian mistress (Dio Cass. 50.4.5), and Antony’s claim to be a descendant of Dionysus, the god of wine (Plut., *Ant.* 24, 26, 71).

37 N.A. Mashkin, “Eschatology and Messianism in the Final Period of the Roman Republic,” *PhilPR* 10.2 (1949): 215 suggests “The years 42, 41, 40 were perhaps the most difficult for Italy.”

38 Kenneth Scott, “The Identification of Augustus with Romulus-Quirinus,” *TAPA* 56 (1925): 94.

39 Petit, *Pax*, 46.

40 Zanker, *Power*, 33 and 84. Fritz Wurzel, *Der Krieg gegen Antonius und Kleopatra in der Darstellung der augusteischen Dichter* (Leipzig: R. Noske, 1941).

41 Suet., *Aug.* 101.

the sovereignty of the Roman people" (Shipley, LCL). The literature of the day disseminated this message of dominance as well, given Augustus's patronage of many widely distributed writers.⁴² One of the most significant pieces was Virgil's Roman national epic the *Aeneid*, written from 29–19 BCE. In response to Venus's lament over the apparent plight of the Trojans (1.227–253) and her son Aeneas (1.259), Jupiter, "the Father of men and gods" (1.254–255), reveals the future of Aeneas's ancestors and its climax in the worldwide reign of Augustan Rome:

Then Romulus, proud in the tawny hide of the she-wolf, his nurse, shall take up the line, and found the walls of Mars and call the people Romans after his own name. *For these I set no bounds in space or time; but have given empire without end.* Spiteful Juno, who now in her fear troubles sea and earth and sky, shall change to better counsels and with me cherish *the Romans, lords of the world*, and the nation of the toga. Thus is it decreed. . . . From this noble line shall be born the Trojan Caesar, who shall extend his empire to the ocean, his glory to the stars, a Julius [Augustus], name descended from great Iulus! Him, in days to come, shall you, anxious no more, welcome to heaven, laden with Eastern spoils; he, too, shall be invoked in vows. Then wars shall cease and savage ages soften; hoary Faith and Vesta, Quirinus with his brother Remus, shall give laws. The gates of war, grim with iron and close-fitting bars, shall be closed; within, impious Rage, sitting on savage arms, his hands fast bound behind with a hundred brazen knots, shall roar in the ghastliness of blood-stained lips.⁴³

Though the *Aeneid* traces the actions of the heroic Aeneas, son of the gods, it also functioned as Augustan propaganda that announced Rome as the "lords of the world" through his reign.⁴⁴

Other literary writers of the day echoed the same imperial message. So Vitruvius (80/70 BCE–15 BCE) opens his first book on architecture, "While, O Caesar, your god-like mind and genius were engaged in acquiring the *dominion of the world (imperio potiretur orbis terrarum)*, your enemies having been all subdued by your unconquerable valour . . ."⁴⁵ Also, Livy (64/59 BCE–17 CE), while describing a vision of Romulus by Proculus Julius, portrays the dead

42 Lawrence Waddy, *Pax Romana and World Peace* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1950), 208.

43 Virgil, *Aen.* 1.267–296 [*emphasis added*] (Fairclough, LCL).

44 Waddy, *Pax*, 208.

45 Vitruvius, *De arch.* 1, Preface 1 (Gwilt) [*emphasis added*]. Cf. Propertius, *Elegies* 3.11.57.

founder of Rome delivering this oracle of stability, “Go tell the Romans, that it is the will of heaven that my Rome should be the head of all the world (*Roma caput orbis terrarum sit*),”⁴⁶ which Ovid reiterates, “The land of other nations has a fixed boundary: The circuit of Rome is the circuit of the world (*Romanae spatium est urbis et orbis idem*).”⁴⁷ The literature of Augustus’s day seemingly speaks with one voice and exclaims: The Roman Empire is the ruler of the kings of the earth.⁴⁸

Various depictions of geography communicated the same message. As Gary Gilbert notes, “Among the various methods Rome used to promote its ideology of universal rule, the listing of foreign nations or peoples proved to be one of the more frequent and effective.”⁴⁹ Inscriptions both inside and outside the city of Rome list conquered nations.⁵⁰ Pliny the elder describes an inscription on a triumphal arch on the Alps that begins, “To the Emperor Caesar—The son of Caesar now deified, Augustus, Pontifex Maximus . . . in remembrance that under his command and auspices all the Alpine nations which extended from the upper sea to the lower were reduced to subjection by the Roman people.”⁵¹ The inscription continues to list forty-six names of Alpine nations subdued by Augustus. Similarly, in Lugdunum, Strabo reports that an altar was erected “bearing an inscription of the names of the tribes, sixty in number.”⁵² These lists served as static propaganda to remind the inhabitants of their subjugation, similar to the intent of coins depicting VICTORIA AVGVSTI.⁵³

Names of towns and cities paraded in imperial processions conveyed the same message of dominance. For example, in Roman triumphs the names of conquered places⁵⁴ along with depictions of their destruction would appear amidst the spoils of war.⁵⁵ Propertius, in a description of an envisioned triumph over the lands east of the Euphrates, desires to witness the spoils paraded through streets and climaxes by saying, “then as I lie reclined on the bosom of my beloved *I will read the names of captured cities*, and will turn mine eyes to

46 Livy, *The History of Rome* 1.16 (Roberts).

47 Ovid, *Fast.* 2.683–684 (Frazer, LCL). See also Ovid, *Fast.* 2.130; Horace, *Carm.* 1.12.49–52; 4.15; cf. Pliny, *H.N.* 3.5; Philo, *Legat.* 8.

48 Strabo, *Geogr.* 17.3.24 adds that Rome ruled the parts of the world that mattered.

49 Gilbert, “List,” 513. See also Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 13, 52, 76–80; Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 290.

50 See *Res gest. divi. Aug.* 25–33; Vell. Pat. 2.39.2; Diod. Sic., *Library of History* 40.4.

51 Pliny, *H.N.* 3.24 (Bostock).

52 Strabo, *Geogr.* 4.3.2 (Jones, LCL).

53 So, Augustus: *RIC* 1a; 1b; 31; 32; 45; 46A; 47a; 48; 49; 61; 62.

54 Dio Cass. 68.29.2.

55 Josephus, *J.W.* 7.139–145.

gaze at the shafts that were hurled by flying horsemen, at the bows of trousered warriors and the captive chiefs that sit beneath the arms that once they bore.”⁵⁶ Likewise, at the funeral procession of Augustus, which was to pass through “the gate of triumph,” Tacitus states, “the names of the nations conquered by Augustus were to be borne in front.”⁵⁷

Lists of nations in static and enacted propaganda illuminates the account in Dio Cassius 67.12.2–4 of Domitian executing Mettius Pompusianus because, among other reasons, “he had a map of the world painted on the walls of his bed-chamber” (Cary, LCL). Domitian’s reaction emphasizes that geography was not just a chronicle of the terrain of the world; it was a symbol of dominance—the subjugation of a world previously unknown.⁵⁸ Geographical depictions were political weapons that communicated the subjugation of a world that was “wild, mysterious, and unknown until the Roman army subjected, measured, and built roads through it.”⁵⁹ Indeed, coins celebrated this key message of the sovereign narrative with the eagle, Roma, Victory, and others standing on the globe,⁶⁰ which loudly proclaimed: The Roman Empire was the ruler of the kings of the earth.⁶¹

Augustus’ successors saw it necessary to imitate this same imperial theme, thereby connecting themselves to Augustus as well as perpetuating their own agendas. To mention just a few, coins minted in the reign of Tiberius depict Victory seated on a globe holding a wreath,⁶² while in the reign of Caligula, Philo—the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher—exclaimed, “Gaius [Caligula], after the death of Tiberius Caesar, assuming the sovereignty of the whole world in a condition free from all sedition.”⁶³ Even during the civil wars of 68–69 CE,

56 Propertius, *Elegies* 3.4.15ff (Loeb, LCL) [*emphasis added*].

57 Tac., *Ann.* 1.8 (Church and Brodribb). Also Dio Cass. 56.34.

58 Mattern, *Rome*, 40. For a discussion on the public map of Agrippa published on the wall of the Porticus Vipsania in Rome see Gilbert, “List,” 513; Zanker, *Power*, 143.

59 Mattern, *Rome*, 41.

60 Eagle—Tiberius: *RIC* 82 (in honor of Augustus). Roma—Galba: *RIC* 44; 45. Victory—Augustus: *RIC* 121; 122; 123; 184; 254a; 254b; 266; 268; 531. See also Augustus: *RIC* 125; 126; 127; 128; 129; 130; 174; 256. See Dio Cass. 43.14.6 for a description of a bronze statue of Julius Caesar mounted on a globe.

61 For Augustus, even clothing communicated Roman dominance. In Suet., *Aug.* 40 (Rolfe, LCL), “a throng of men in dark cloaks” are chastised by Augustus who quotes Jupiter in *Aeneid* 1.282, “Romans, lords of the world, the nation clad in the toga!” Suetonius concludes, “. . . and [Augustus] directed the aediles never again to allow anyone to appear in the Forum or its neighbourhood except in the toga and without a cloak.”

62 Tiberius: *RIC* 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 19; 20; 21; 22.

63 Philo, *Legat.* 8 (Yonge). Cf. Sen., *Epigr.* 29.4.

the message of Roman dominance still rang out amidst the murderous pang of Roman soldiers fighting Roman soldiers⁶⁴—a message strongly emphasized in the subsequent Flavian dynasty.

Message #1 in Flavian Propaganda

Tacitus describes the unpleasant discovery in 68 CE that sent the whole Roman world into the chaos of civil war once again: “for now had been divulged that secret of the empire, that emperors could be made elsewhere than at Rome.”⁶⁵ The atrocities that ensued left the entire Roman world longing for security and stability; in a single year (69 CE), four men claimed the title of emperor.⁶⁶ So desperate for *Pax*, the people of the empire were willing to accept a new dynasty, even one that lacked familial nobility.⁶⁷

The Flavian dynasty commenced in 69 CE when Vespasian seized the throne, and as a result, the Julio-Claudian dynasty came to its denouement.⁶⁸ In order to secure imperial power, the Flavian propaganda had to accomplish two key tasks: [1] erase the memory of the civil war that brought them power and [2] pronounce restoration of the supremacy of Rome—similar obstacles faced by Augustus when he came to power in 31 BCE after the Battle of Actium.⁶⁹

To legitimize the Flavian claim to the Roman throne, the shame of the civil war that spilled Roman blood was replaced with the honorable victory over a foreign enemy.⁷⁰ After the suppression of the Jewish revolt in 70 CE, concluding with the destruction of the temple,⁷¹ the Flavians began to depict this event

64 Coins under Galba depict Roma standing on a globe (*RIC* 45; 60), and coins under Vitellius show Victory standing on the globe (*RIC* 16).

65 Tac., *Hist.* 1.4 (Church and Brodribb); see also 1.50.

66 Yet, in the middle of this turmoil, coins minted by Otho (*RIC* 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12) and Vitellius (*RIC* 117; 118; 139; 140; 147; 157) proclaimed PAX and SECURITAS.

67 Suet., *Vesp.* 1.

68 Hereditary progression of the principate was difficult for the Flavian dynasty due to Nero's disastrous end to the Julio-Claudian dynasty. For more, see Petit, *Pax*, 147; Waddy, *Pax*, 86–87.

69 For Flavian propaganda that parallels Augustus, see: the placement of the *Templum Pacis* [Noreña, “Medium,” 27]; legal and titular connections to Augustus [Noreña, “Medium,” 27 (n. 20)]; statuary [Friesen, *Imperial*, 176]; and numismatics [Mason Hammond, “Res olim dissociabiles: Principatus ac Libertas: Liberty under the Early Roman Empire,” *HSCP* 67 (1963): 101–102; and idem, “A Statue of Trajan Represented on the ‘Anaglypha Traiani,’” *MAAR* 21 (1953): 160–161]. For subtle separation from the Augustan line through Senatorial modifications, see Waddy, *Pax*, 88.

70 Martin Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt Against Rome AD 66–70* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 236; Noreña, “Medium,” 35.

71 Josephus, *J.W.* 6.435ff.

as a decisive Roman victory over a foreign nation—even celebrating a Roman triumph in 71 CE over the subjugated Jewish enemy (depicted on the Arch of Titus near the Roman Forum).⁷² Coins minted early in the Flavian reign depict mourning Jewish people with captions that announce *IUDEA CAPTA*.⁷³ As seen below, the Jewish captive appears on the Flavian coin bound and in a position of subjugation beneath the trophy of arms similar to the barbarian captives in the second Flavian coin celebrating the victory of Agricola in Britain in 79–80 CE. The Flavian propaganda, then, presented the suppression of the Jewish revolt as the foreign military victory that contributed to the legitimacy of their claim to the Roman throne.⁷⁴



FIGURE 3.1 *June–July 79 CE. Dedicated to Titus. Jewish captive kneels before a trophy of arms. TITUS: RIC 1. IMAGE USED WITH PERMISSION OF CLASSICAL NUMISMATIC GROUP, INC. (<WWW.CNGCOINS.COM>).*

72 Josephus, *J.W.* 7.115–157. For discussion on the Roman triumph of 71 CE, the Arch of Titus, and the importance of the Jewish defeat to the Flavian Dynasty, see pp. 151–158 below.

73 So Vespasian: *RIC* 424; 425; 426; 427 (cf. *RIC* 15; 16). For discussion of the importance of the *IUDEA CAPTA* coins, see pp. 155–156 below.

74 Goodman, *Ruling*, 235 concurs, “Such types, usually issued by Rome only to commemorate victory over foreign enemies such as Armenia—the suppression of Boudicca in Britain in AD 60, for example, went unrecorded on the coins—proclaimed that the Jews were a hostile people subjected by the might of Rome.” Also, Noreña, 36 and 41 argues that the Flavian *Templum Pacis* was constructed and maintained to emphasize the Jewish conquest as a foreign victory.



FIGURE 3.2 80 CE. Dedicated to Titus. British captives bound beneath a trophy of arms.

TITUS: RIC 21B. IMAGE USED WITH PERMISSION OF CLASSICAL NUMISMATIC GROUP, INC. (<WWW.CNGCOINS.COM>).

The Flavian propaganda was not complete without the emphatic re-establishment of the sovereign narrative message that proclaimed: The Roman Empire is the ruler of the kings of the earth. In literature, Josephus recounts Agrippa II's plea for the Jews to submit to the Roman powers, "Now, when *almost all people under the sun submit to the Roman arms*, will you be the only people that make war against them?"⁷⁵ Pliny the Elder, who dedicates *Natural History* to Titus,⁷⁶ proclaims that once again Rome is "the Capital of the world (*terrarum caput*)" and lauds the prominence of the empire under the Flavians as "chosen by the providence of the Gods to render even heaven itself more glorious, to unite the scattered empires of the earth . . . to become, in short, the mother-country of all nations of the Earth."⁷⁷ Moreover, new building constructions changed the horizon of the city of Rome,⁷⁸ visually depicting what the words on the Flavian coins heralded: the 'Resurgence' and 'Perpetuation' of Rome.⁷⁹ Thus, under the Flavians, Rome was once again the ruler of the world.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Josephus, *J.W.* 2.380 (Whiston) [*emphasis added*].

⁷⁶ Pliny, *H.N.* 1.1.

⁷⁷ Pliny, *H.N.* 3.6 (Bostock).

⁷⁸ For discussion on the building projects of the Flavians, see pp. 153–155 below.

⁷⁹ For more discussion, see Bond, "Coinage," 154 and Martin Percival Charlesworth, "Providentis and Aeternitas," *HTR* 29.2 (1936): 126.

⁸⁰ Titus RIC 97 shows Vespasian handing a globe to Titus.

Conclusion for Message #1

The static and enacted propaganda of Rome intended to communicate a message of dominance, a message of subjugation, a message that loudly proclaimed to the Roman and the non-Roman, to the educated and the uneducated: The Roman Empire is the ruler of the kings of the earth. While Augustus was the architect of this grammar, his articulation created the trajectory of imperial propaganda for all future emperors, even beyond the first century CE.⁸¹ This message became a key component to the Roman sovereign narrative saturating the busiest intersections of life for the subjects of the empire.

Message #2: The Roman Empire is Favored by the Gods

Dionysius of Halicarnassus (60 BCE–7 BCE) instructs posterity, “To understand the success of the Romans, you must understand their piety.”⁸² From the earliest accounts of Roman society, the collective attitude was religiously oriented, and therefore, a key message of their sovereign narrative was: The Roman Empire is favored by the gods. As the Romans wrote to the people of Teos in 193 BCE, “our piety is evident from the favour of the gods which we enjoy.”⁸³ The Romans, therefore, perceived a causal relationship between their piety and the favor of the gods and between the favor of the gods and their success in war.⁸⁴ For this reason, religion and conquest in the Roman Empire were intricately interwoven.

A common practice in Roman conquest was to lure or woo the enemy gods into the Roman Pantheon to help secure victory.⁸⁵ Livy recounts a scene from the Punic Wars against Hannibal (264 BCE–241 BCE) in which the citizens of Rome, eager for the war to conclude, consult the Sibylline Books due to “the

81 See Aelius Aristides, *To Rome* 36; Jerome, *Epist.* 60.17; 77.11; Rut. Namat. 1.66.

82 Quoted by R.M. Ogilvie, *The Romans and Their Gods in the Age of Augustus* (London: W.W. Norton, 1969), 8. For the etymology of ‘piety,’ see Mashkin, “Eschatology,” 217.

83 Quoted in J.P.V.D. Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1979), 2.

84 Michael Grant, *History of Rome* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1978), 20. Describing the iconography in the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias from the Julio-Claudian era, Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 8 remarks, “The architecture and art of this jewel of a building complex render violence divinely supported, maps the ethnicities of the world as belonging to Rome, and suggests that Roman power is pious and inevitable, blowing across the Mediterranean like a force of nature.” For further discussion, see Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 7, 77–80.

85 J. Bayet, *Histoire politique et psychologique de la religion romaine* (Paris: Payot, 1957), 122.

unusual number of showers of stones which had fallen during the year." The oracles announce that "whenever a foreign foe should carry war into Italy he could be driven out and conquered if the Mater Idaea [Cybele] were brought from Pessinus to Rome." Immediately, the key Roman officials began to plan out a way to bring the goddess to Rome in order "to secure all the sooner the victory which the Fates, the omens, and the oracles alike foreshadowed" (Livy 29.10, Roberts). The success of the war, then, was a result of the favor of the gods shown to the Romans.

This same belief motivated later Roman rulers to emphasize divine associations as justification for their claims to power. While Julius Caesar accented a unique relationship between his family and Venus Genetrix,⁸⁶ Mark Antony fashioned himself as a 'New Dionysus,'⁸⁷ and, not to be outdone, Octavian connected himself with Apollo.⁸⁸ This development displays the importance of divine favor; the connection to the gods consolidated their goodwill (*pax deorum*) which resulted in military success. So ingrained was this belief in the Roman sovereign narrative, decades after the first century CE, the Christian theologian Tertullian, in *The Apology* 25, denotes:

However, having been led thus naturally to speak of the Romans, I shall not avoid the controversy which is invited by the groundless assertion of those who maintain that, *as a reward of their singular homage to religion, the Romans have been raised to such heights of power as to have become masters of the world (ut orbem occuparint)*; and that so certainly divine are the beings they worship, that those prosper beyond all others, who beyond all others honour them. This, forsooth, *is the wages the gods have paid the Romans for their devotion.*⁸⁹

Consequently, the static and enacted propaganda of Augustus and the emperors that followed communicated this second key message (causally related to the first): The Roman Empire is favored by the gods.

86 Suet., *Jul.* 78; Virgil, *Aen.* 1.259.

87 Plut., *Ant.* 24, 26.

88 Suet., *Aug.* 50. See also Zanker, *Power*, 50.

89 *ANF* 3:39 (*emphasis added*).

Message #2 in Imperial Propaganda—From Augustus to the Flavians

Heeding the caution of Horace,⁹⁰ Augustus began a comprehensive reconstruction program for the religious buildings in ruin shortly after his victory at Actium. In *Res Gestae* 20, Augustus boasts the reparation of 82 temples in Rome “omitting none which at that time stood in need of repair” (Shipley, LCL). In addition, he constructed new temples to Jupiter Tonans, Mars Ultor, and even a temple to Apollo connected to his residence.⁹¹ Augustus continued the religious reform by appointing priestly positions and colleges long forgotten and also preserving religious works like the Sibylline books.⁹² These religious actions were visual propaganda announcing the restoration of the favor of the gods under Augustus, which secured Roman dominance.

Similarly, the shift from the name ‘Octavian’ to ‘Augustus’ carried religious and political significance. Until 28/27 BCE, the rising leader went by the name Octavian and, at times, Caesar (after his adopted father Julius). Around this time, some suggested he should change his name to Romulus, because he was “a second founder of the city.”⁹³ Initially, the name Romulus was quite appealing to Caesar, “but when he perceived that this [desire for the name Romulus] caused him to be suspected of desiring the kingship,”⁹⁴ Octavian immediately rejected the name. Instead, he adopted the more religiously oriented title ‘Augustus,’ which he attributes to the senate’s gratefulness.⁹⁵ With linguistic parallels to religiously-oriented terms,⁹⁶ the name Augustus possessed a level of sacred reverence. Lawrence Waddy celebrates, “‘Augustus’ was the perfect name. It has all the dignity of ‘His Majesty,’ with an additional religious flavor. But it does not imply any extravagant claim to divinity.”⁹⁷

In addition to ‘Augustus,’ another title, which had proved elusive for twenty-four years, was acquired in 12 BCE. In 36 BCE, Lepidus, one-third of the second

90 Horace, *Carm.* 3.6 (Conington), “Your fathers’ guilt you still must pay, Roman, until you have rebuilt the temples and restored all the ruined sanctuaries with their dark images of the gods stained with smoke.”

91 Jupiter Tonans: Dio Cass. 54.4.2. Mars Ultor: Dio Cass. 54.8.3. Apollo: Dio Cass. 53.1.3. William Charles Korfmacher, “Vergil, Spokesman for the Augustan Reforms,” *CJ* 51.7 (1956): 330–331.

92 Priest of Jupiter: Suet., *Aug.* 31; Dio Cass. 54.36.1. Vestal Virgins: Suet., *Aug.* 31; Dio Cass. 55.22.5. Sibylline Books: Dio Cass. 54.17.2; Suet., *Aug.* 31.

93 Suetonius, *Aug.* 7 (Rolfe, LCL).

94 Dio Cass. 53.16.6–8 (Cary, LCL).

95 *Res gest. divi Aug.* 34.

96 For the etymological connection of ‘Augustus’ and ‘augury,’ see Suet., *Aug.* 7.

97 Waddy, *Pax*, 43. See also Scott, “Identification,” 90. With exaggerated language, Florus 4.12.66 attests to the name’s religious significance.



FIGURE 3.3 *Dedicated to Augustus with both titles: Augustus and Pontifex Maximus.*

AUGUSTUS: RIC 219. IMAGE USED WITH PERMISSION OF CLASSICAL NUMISMATIC GROUP, INC. (<WWW.CNGCOINS.COM>).⁹⁸

triumvirate (Octavian and Antony), was exiled while still possessing the title, ‘*Pontifex Maximus*.’ Although Augustus desired the title while Lepidus was alive,⁹⁹ Augustus proudly exclaims, “I declined to be made Pontifex Maximus in succession to a colleague still living [Lepidus]. . . . Several years later I accepted that sacred office when he at last was dead [in 12 BCE]. . . .”¹⁰⁰ In celebration, both religious names (Augustus and *Pontifex Maximus*) flood Augustan coinage, as seen in the coin’s caption above.

With the goddess *Pax* on the reverse, this static propaganda, and others like it, connects the reign of Augustus (building projects, titles, etc.) to the favor of the gods through his religious devotion.¹⁰¹ As Zanker suggests, “His piety was put on display for every Roman to see, making it clear that he considered the performance of his religious duties his greatest responsibility and highest honor.”¹⁰²

98 See also Augustus: RIC 220; 229; 230; 427; 428; 429; 431.

99 Suet., *Aug.* 31.

100 *Res gest. divi Aug.* 10 (Shipley, LCL).

101 In Dio Cass. 54.35.2 (Cary, LCL) the senate and the people of Rome attempt to set up statues of Augustus. Instead, he uses the money to “set up statues of Salus Publica, Concordia, and Pax” to emphasize the favor of the gods. When he did allow statues to be put up of him, Zanker, *Power*, 127 points out, “. . . he preferred that statues put up in his honor show him togate at sacrifice or prayer.”

102 Zanker, *Power*, 127.

The emperors succeeding Augustus perpetuated this message through similar actions and images. Tiberius continued the temple building projects initiated by Augustus.¹⁰³ Coins under Claudius, Nero, the Flavians, and others depicted the gods as the impetus of Roman dominance, with the titles Augustus and *Pontifex Maximus*, at times, in the caption.¹⁰⁴ Even the literature produced after Augustus proclaimed the favor of the gods. In Josephus *J.W.* 6.33–40, Titus exhorts his soldiers to continue to fight against the Jews in their siege of the city of Jerusalem. At a key point, in order to “make men to forget the hazards they run,” (33) Titus exclaims:

... for as to our misfortunes, they have been owing to the madness of the Jews, while their sufferings have been owing to your valor, and the *assistance God hath afforded you*; for as to the seditions they have been in, and the famine they are under, and the siege they now endure, and the fall of their walls without our engines, what can they all be but *demonstrations of God's anger against them, and of his assistance afforded us?* (6.39–40, Whiston)¹⁰⁵

This text, composed under Flavian rule, suggests the Jewish God abandoned his people and aligned himself with Rome, which both explains the Roman victory over the Jews and perpetuates the message of the empire's divine favor.

Conclusion for Message #2

From the time of Augustus throughout the first century CE, imperial propaganda claimed that the Roman Empire was the ruler of the kings of the earth because Rome was favored by the gods. As mentioned above, it was Jupiter who decreed, “For [Rome] I set no bounds in space or time; but have given empire without end.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, the sovereign narrative of Augustus, and therefore the emperors that followed, immersed the subjects of the empire in a world of images declaring: The Roman Empire is favored by the gods.

103 Tac., *Ann.* 2.49.

104 Tiberius: *RIC* 5; 6; 7; 8 (the goddess Victory seated on a globe). Claudius: *RIC* 21; 22 (*Pontifex Maximus* on the obverse with PACI AVGVSTAE on the reverse). Nero: *RIC* 477; 478 (*Pontifex Maximus* on the obverse with the goddess Victory on the reverse). Vitellius: *RIC* 16 (the goddess Victory standing on a globe). Vespasian: *RIC* 92 (*Pontifex Maximus* on the reverse with the goddess Victory). Titus: *RIC* 158 (minted by Vespasian—the goddess Victory standing on the globe with the caption VIC AVG). Domitian: *RIC* 40 (*Pontifex Maximus* on the obverse with an Eagle on the reverse standing on a thunderbolt).

105 *Emphasis* added.

106 Virgil, *Aen.* 1.267–296 (Fairclough, LCL).

Message #3: The Roman Empire is the Bearer of Pax

The definition of the *Pax Romana* ('Peace of Rome') is usually expressed under one of two categories (or a combination of both): [1] lack of war or [2] tangible benefits.¹⁰⁷ First, *Pax Romana* as 'lack of war' emerges through a comparison to the civil war period before the Battle of Actium.¹⁰⁸ As Gary Miles notes, "The experience of the civil wars was sufficiently shattering that Romans emphasized the distinction between *pax* and *discordia*, 'civil war,' and identified *pax* simply as the absence of *discordia*."¹⁰⁹ So, it is a lack of 'civil war' that, for some, denotes the *Pax Romana*,¹¹⁰ and, by extension, the absence of fear for the Roman "that war would overrun his home."¹¹¹

The *Pax Romana* was not the complete cessation of war, but 'peace' through *foreign* war. As Paul Petit observes, "The emperors in fact made war in order to further the security of the mother-country . . . by pushing the frontiers forward the Empire had driven the barbarians far from its vital centres."¹¹² Augustus himself describes this program of 'peace through war':

I extended the boundaries of all the provinces which were *bordered by races not yet subject to our empire*. The provinces of the Gauls, the Spains, and Germany . . . I *reduced to a state of peace*. The Alps . . . I brought to a state of peace without waging on any tribe an *unjust war* . . . On my order and under my auspices two armies were led, at almost the same time, into Ethiopia and into Arabia . . . and very large forces of the enemy of both races were cut to pieces in battle and many towns were captured.¹¹³

107 Waddy, *Pax*, 69 and Petit, *Pax*, 20 emphasize a time frame in their definitions of *Pax Romana*—Waddy 31 BCE–161 CE and Petit 31 BCE–193 CE. This definition, however, is inextricably linked to the two categories mentioned above (lack of war and tangible benefits), in that they are the criteria by which the time periods are designated the *Pax Romana*. For the etymological significance of *Pax*, see Harald Fuchs, *Augustin und der antike Friedensgedanke* (Berlin: Garland, 1926), 182ff.

108 Waddy, *Pax*, 29.

109 Gary Miles, "Glorious Peace: The Values and Motivation of Virgil's Aeneas," *CSCA* 9 (1976): 152.

110 Bradley, "Captives," 301; Paul Jal, *La guerre civile à Rome* (Paris: University of France, 1963); Noreña, "Medium," 34; Petit, *Pax*, 74.

111 Waddy, *Pax*, 172; Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 11–19.

112 Petit, *Pax*, 15–16.

113 *Res gest. divi Aug.* 26 (Shipley, LCL) [*emphasis added*]. See also Tac., *Agr.* 20.1; *Ann.* 12.33.

With this definition, there is no contradiction between the idyllic claims of the *Pax Romana* and yet the existence of war.¹¹⁴

Other definitions of the 'Peace of Rome' emphasize the tangible benefits for those in the Roman Empire with varying nuances. Some, for example, highlight the safety in travel, whether by land or by sea. In regards to the Damascene country, Strabo writes, "For the most part, indeed, the barbarians have been robbing the merchants from Arabia Felix, but this is less the case now that the band of robbers under Zenodorus has been broken up through the good government established by the Romans and through the security established by the Roman soldiers that are kept in Syria."¹¹⁵ Safety in travel directly affects the business of the merchants and stresses the economic benefits of the *Pax Romana*.

Due to the safety of travel by sea, merchants could transport their goods across the empire free from the fear of pirates¹¹⁶ resulting in economic prosperity. Suetonius records a unique display of gratitude toward Augustus by merchants at Puteoli:

As [Augustus] sailed by the gulf of Puteoli, it happened that from an Alexandrian ship which had just arrived there, the passengers and crew, clad in white, crowned with garlands, and burning incense, lavished upon him good wishes and the highest praise, saying that it was through him they lived, through him that they sailed the sea, and through him that they enjoyed their liberty and their fortune.¹¹⁷

As Klaus Wengst notes, "Compared with all that the then world knew of its past, this state of affairs must have seemed to all those alive at the time to be the golden age."¹¹⁸

Indeed, as the civil wars concluded at the Battle of Actium, the world was transformed by the reign of Augustus so that even the earth seemed excited to celebrate through its abundance. As Velleius Paterculus commemorates,

¹¹⁴ Wengst, *Pax*, 17, "Despite all the assertions to the contrary, the *Pax Romana* was not really a world peace. This Peace, gained and secured by military force, had its limits at the limits of the Roman empire."

¹¹⁵ Strabo, *Geogr.* 16.2.20 (Jones, LCL). See Grant, *World*, 63; Wengst, *Pax*, 26–37.

¹¹⁶ *Res gest. divi Aug.* 25.

¹¹⁷ Suet., *Aug.* 98 (Rolfe, LCL). See S. Thomas Parker, "Peasants, Pastoralists, and 'Pax Romana': A Different View," *BASOR* 265 (1987): 40 for Rome's interaction with raiding nomadic groups in Southern Palestine at the south-eastern *limes* of the empire.

¹¹⁸ Wengst, *Pax*, 8, even though this author is highly critical of the *Pax Romana* throughout this work.

"The civil wars were ended after twenty years, foreign wars suppressed, *peace restored*, the frenzy of arms everywhere lulled to rest . . . *Agriculture returned to the fields*, respect to religion, to mankind freedom from anxiety, and to each citizen his property rights were now assured."¹¹⁹ This peace, however, was not merely the machinations of man, but the Romans regarded it to be the result of the favor the gods (*pax deorum*).¹²⁰ Ovid merrily relates the emergence of the dominance of Rome: "Add incense, ye priests, to the flames that burn on the altar of Peace, let a white victim fall with cloven brow, and ask of the gods, who lend a favouring ear to pious prayers, that the house, which is the warranty of peace, with peace may last for ever."¹²¹ It is understandable, then, to see the *Pax deorum* as made manifest in the *Pax Romana*—which, due to Augustan propaganda, was also the *Pax Augusta*.¹²² Therefore, central to the sovereign narrative and Augustan propaganda was the message: The Roman Empire is the bearer of *Pax*.

Message #3 in Augustan Propaganda

Dio Cassius recounts the events following the Battle of Actium as frenzied excitement. The announcement of victory was heralded by a frantic soldier who "ran up to the temple on the Capitol and laid his sword at the feet of Jupiter, to signify that there would be no further use for it."¹²³ The *Res Gestae* and other literature contemporary with Augustus depict the same propaganda: the Roman Empire is the bearer of *Pax*.¹²⁴

Regarding Augustan numismatics, G.E.F. Chilver remarks, "... the clearest boast of Augustan coins and messages lies in the bringing of Pax, an end to civil bloodshed and to party strife,"¹²⁵ which reflects the message found on inscriptions across the empire proclaiming, "Perpetual Peace and Concord in Augustus."¹²⁶ In addition to the dedication of the Ara Pacis Augustae altar on the Campus Martius, Strabo records the founding of a colony in "the Celtic

119 Vell. Pat. 2.89.3–4 (Shipley, LCL) [*emphasis added*].

120 Ovid, *Fast.* 4.407.

121 Ovid, *Fast.* 1.719–722 (Frazer, LCL). See also *Res gest. divi Aug.* 4.

122 Vell. Pat. 2.126.3.

123 Dio Cass. 49.15.2 (Cary, LCL).

124 *Res gest. divi Aug.* 1, 3, 13, 25, 26. Virgil, *Aen.* 1.294.

125 G.E.F. Chilver, "The Aftermath of Caesar," *GR* 4.1 (1957): 74. So, *RIC* 220 = the obverse bears Augustus's image while the reverse depicts the goddess Pax; *RIC* 253 = the obverse has the image of Pax while the reverse has Octavian in military apparel holding a spear; *RIC* 252 = Octavian's image is on the obverse with the reverse showing Pax; *RIC* 476 (from Ephesus) = obverse depicts Octavian while the reverse shows the goddess Pax and the caption PAX.

126 Stefan Weinstock, "Pax and the 'Ara Pacis,'" *JRS* 50 (1960): 49.

country” by the name of “Pax Augusta.”¹²⁷ This static propaganda saturated the empire under Augustus with the message of Roman *Pax*.

The enacted propaganda associated with the temple of Janus proclaimed the same message. Assumed to have originated under the second king of Rome Numa Pompilius (715 BCE–673 BCE),¹²⁸ a sacred ritual, rarely implemented in the time before Augustus, involved the closing of the doors of the temple of Janus, symbolic of the cessation of war.¹²⁹ In Ovid, Janus proudly describes his authority:

Whate’er you see anywhere—sky, sea, clouds, earth—all things are closed and opened by my hand. The guardianship of this vast universe is in my hands alone, and none but me may rule the wheeling pole. When I choose to send forth Peace from tranquil halls, she freely walks the ways unhindered. But with blood and slaughter the whole world would welter, did not the bars unbending hold the barricaded wars. I sit at heaven’s gate with the gentle Hours; my office regulates the goings and comings of Jupiter himself. Janus is my name.¹³⁰

The closing of the temple of Janus, therefore, proclaimed universal peace, and in the reign of Augustus, the doors were said to have been closed on at least three occasions.¹³¹ Augustus proudly states, “Janus Quirinius, which our ancestors ordered to be closed whenever there was peace, secured by victory, throughout the whole domain of the Roman people on land and sea, and which, before my birth is recorded to have been closed but twice in all since the foundation of the city, the senate ordered to be closed thrice while I was princeps.”¹³² This enacted propaganda enforced the message of the sovereign narrative that Rome was the divine agent of *Pax*.

127 Strabo, *Geogr.* 3.2.15 (Jones, LCL). Cf. *Res gest. divi Aug.* 16. For discussion, see Weinstock, “Pax,” 48; Jonathan Edmondson, ed., *Augustus* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 140.

128 Ronald Syme, “Problems about Janus,” *AJP* 100.1 (1979): 188.

129 Vell. Pat. 2.38.3 (Shipley, LCL) laments, “It is a strong proof of the warlike character of our state that only three times did the closing of the temple of the double-faced Janus give proof of unbroken peace. . . .”

130 Ovid, *Fast.* 1.117–126 (Frazer, LCL). Syme, “Problems,” 192 discusses Roman writers that differ regarding what was locked inside the temple of Janus—either Pax for her protection or War as a prisoner.

131 For discussion on the dates of the three closings, see Syme, “Problems,” 188–189, 194; Inez Scott Ryberg, “The Procession of the Ara Pacis,” *MAAR* 19 (1949): 92.

132 *Res gest. divi Aug.* 13 (Shipley, LCL). See also Suet., *Aug.* 21; Dio Cass. 51.20.4.



FIGURE 3.4 43–44 CE. Dedicated to Claudius with both titles: Augustus and Pontifex Maximus. CLAUDIUS: RIC 21. IMAGE USED WITH PERMISSION OF CLASSICAL NUMISMATIC GROUP, INC. (<WWW.CNGCOINS.COM>).¹³³

The static and enacted propaganda of other emperors reiterated the same Augustan message of *Pax*. Imitating Augustus, Nero, upon receiving the Arsacid prince Tiridates with lavish displays of supplication, announced that “no war was left anywhere” by closing the doors to the temple of Janus.¹³⁴ In addition to other static propaganda (like inscriptions),¹³⁵ the numismatic evidence portrays the same captions and imagery found on Augustan coins. As seen above, this coin from Claudius displays on the obverse his image with the typical legend titles that include ‘Augustus’ and ‘*Pontifex Maximus*’ among others. The reverse depicts a *Pax*-Nemesis holding a winged caduceus just above a serpent on the ground. Around her is the caption: *PACI AVGVSTAE* (‘Augustan Peace’). Ironically, similar images and captions appear on coins minted by emperors in the civil war of 68–69 CE.¹³⁶

133 For a statue of Claudius in the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias connoting *Pax*, see Friesen, *Imperial*, 91–92.

134 Suet., *Nero* 13 (Rolfe, LCL).

135 For inscriptions under Tiberius, see Weinstock, “*Pax*,” 50–51. Also, R. Boecklin and J.P. Hyatt, “A New Inscription of Jerash,” *AJA* 38.4 (1934): 512 records an inscription from 66–67 CE (under Nero) proclaiming the “*Pax Augusta*.” For *Pax* propaganda in the Severan dynasty (193–235 CE), see J. Starcky and C.M. Bennett, “Les inscriptions du Téménos,” *Syria* 45 (1968): 41–66.

136 Galba: RIC 279; 323; 283 (the reverse displays the goddess *Pax* with the caption *PAX AVGVST*). Otho: RIC 3; 4; 5 (the reverse has the goddess *Pax* with the caption *PAX ORBIS*).

Like other civil war emperors, the Flavians heralded the ‘Peace of Rome’ as well but with a heightened intensity not implemented since the time of Augustus.

Message #3 in the Flavian Propaganda

The message of *Pax* inundated Flavian Propaganda as a seemingly intentional response to the chaos of the civil wars through which they came to power. Like Augustus after the Battle of Actium, it was essential to construct a public image stressing the rejection of *discordia* (‘civil war’) and pronouncing the cessation of war. As many scholars have pointed out, the depiction of *Pax* was widely distributed throughout the imperial world on Flavian coinage,¹³⁷ and at times highlighted other related themes like ‘hope’ and ‘stability.’¹³⁸ A Domitianic coin struck in 85 CE shows an ardent depiction of the goddess *Pax* on the reverse setting fire to a pile of weapons.

Parallel to Augustus, the Flavians named regions ‘Pax’¹³⁹ and closed the doors to the temple of Janus after the victory over the Jewish nation.¹⁴⁰ Vespasian intensified his focus on the *Pax* propaganda by building the *Templum Pacis* (‘Temple of Peace’) in the center of Rome, started in 71 and dedicated in 75.¹⁴¹ Enthusiastically, contemporary literature¹⁴² and various public and private inscriptions praised the return of *Pax* to Rome.¹⁴³ Whether static or enacted,

TERRARVM). Vitellius: *RIC* 117; 118; 157v (the reverse shows the goddess Pax with the caption PAX AVGVSTI).

137 So Noreña, “Medium,” 29; Weinstock, “Pax,” 52; Bond, “Coinage,” 154; Edwin S. Ramage, “Denigration of Predecessor under Claudius, Galba, and Vespasian,” *ZAG* 32.2 (1983): 211. M.C. Bishop, “A New Flavian Military Site at Roecliffe, North Yorkshire,” *Britannia* 36 (2005): 179 records at least four Flavian coins with the legend PAX in Britannia at the excavation of a military site in Roecliffe, North Yorkshire.

138 For discussion on *Spes* (‘Hope’), see Mark Edward Clark, “*Spes* in the Early Imperial Cult: ‘The Hope of Augustus,’” *Numen* 30.1 (1983): 93. For *Aeternitas* (‘stability’), see Waddy, *Pax*, 100 (n. 25).

139 Dio Cass. 65.15.1. See also, Noreña, “Medium,” 32 for discussion of the colony in Thrace named *Flavia Pacis Deultensium*.

140 Oros. 7.3.8.

141 Josephus, *J.W.* 7.158; Suet., *Vesp.* 9; cf. Dio Cass. 73.24.1. Noreña, “Medium,” 31 observes that the denarii under Vespasian bearing the description PAX initially surge in 71 CE, the date the construction on the *Templum Pacis* started, and then another spike in production, higher than the first, in 75 CE—the year the temple was dedicated.

142 Pliny, *H.N.* 27.3. Under Domitian, see Statius, *Silv.* 4.1; Martial, *Epigrams* 10.70.

143 For inscriptions from private citizens in honor of Vespasian (indicating clarity in the imperial propaganda), see Noreña, “Medium,” 32–33. For inscriptions outside of Rome, see Weinstock, “Pax,” 51 (n. 92).



FIGURE 3.5 85 CE. Dedicated to Domitian. The goddess Pax ignites weapons.

DOMITIAN: RIC II 364. IMAGE USED WITH PERMISSION OF ACR AUCTIONS
(WWW.ARTCOINSROMA.IT).

the Flavian propaganda joined in unison with the Augustan sovereign narrative: Under the Flavians, Rome was the divine agent of *Pax*.

Conclusion for Message #3

For the purposes of this chapter, it matters little if the *Pax Romana* was actual or fictional, accessible to everyone or limited, benevolent or malevolent.¹⁴⁴ What is significant, however, is that the imperial billboards from Augustus onward presented a world of imagery to their subjects that depicted the cessation of war and abundant benefits for those within the boundaries of the empire. In other words, a key message of Rome's Sovereign Narrative was: The Roman Empire is the bearer of *Pax*.

The Sovereign Narrative of Rome: Three Messages Made One

Although, for the most part, this chapter has examined all three messages of the Roman sovereign narrative separately, the three messages are intricately

¹⁴⁴ Richard Bauckham, "The Economic Critique of Rome in Revelation 18," in *Images of Empire* (ed. Loveday Alexander; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1991), 55–56 exclaims, "The *Pax Romana* is really a system of economic exploitation of the empire. Rome's subjects give far more to her than she gives to them." The statement above does not necessarily disagree with this assessment; this just falls outside of the scope of this chapter.

interwoven into a single unit of potent propaganda. Indeed, each message reinforces and relies on the other two—for in the sovereign narrative, the Roman Empire is the ruler of the kings of the earth [#1], because it has secured the favor of the gods [#2]. This favor of the gods [#2] is evident in the Roman Empire's ability to secure and perpetuate *Pax* [#3] through their military dominance [#1]. All three messages of the Roman sovereign narrative coalesce in a powerful depiction of enacted propaganda known as Roman triumphal processions.

Enacted Propaganda: Roman Triumphal Processions

As one of the “sweetest fruits of war and of peace,”¹⁴⁵ the Roman triumphal procession, or Roman triumph, was the climax of honor for the victor and the climax of humiliation for the conquered. During the parade, the plebs of the city would flood the streets to catch a glimpse of the spoils of war (e.g., foreign armor, unusual animals, unfamiliar peoples) symbolizing the victory and dominance of Rome. Along with the bound captive leader(s) and the magnificent *quadriga*,¹⁴⁶ the emperor's glory was celebrated in the enactment of the sovereign narrative by the entire empire.

The Roman triumphal procession was such effective enacted propaganda the participants replicated its impact in static propaganda as well. The *Fasti Triumphales*—an inscription on stone tablets in the Roman Forum from ca. 12 BCE—enshrined over two-hundred triumphs from Rome's foundation to the time of Augustus, beginning with “King Romulus, son of Mars” in 753 BCE.¹⁴⁷ Augustus, in addition to limiting triumphs to the imperial house,¹⁴⁸

145 Chariton, *Chaer.* 8.1.12 quoted in Douglas R. Edwards, “Surviving the Web of Roman Power: Religion and Politics in the Acts of the Apostles, Josephus, and Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe*,” in *Images and Empire* (ed. Loveday Alexander; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1991), 196.

146 The *quadriga*, the triumphant's chariot normally pulled by four horses, became a stock symbol for the Roman triumph as a whole. *Res gest. divi Aug.* 35 relays the statue in the Forum Augustum of a *quadriga* erected in honor of Augustus by the senate and inscribed with the title ‘*Pater Patriae*.’ Similarly, coins struck throughout the reign of Augustus and the emperors that followed depict a *quadriga*. So, Augustus: *RIC* 99; 100; 108a; 108b [cf. Tiberius: *RIC* 56; 62—Augustus is in a *quadriga* pulled by elephants]; Tiberius: *RIC* 1; 2; 3; 4; 54; Vespasian: *RIC* 364; Titus: *RIC* 159 (minted under Vespasian); Domitian: *RIC* 185; 185a.

147 Zanker, *Power*, 203; Jean Gagé, “Psychologie du culte impérial romain,” *Diogenes* 34 (1961): 47–68.

148 Miriam Griffin, “*Urbs Roma, Plebs and Princeps*,” in *Images and Empire* (ed. Loveday Alexander; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1991): 42; Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 61–71. The *Fasti Triumphales* ends with the Triumph of Cornelius Balbus in 19 BCE, presumably the last one celebrated by someone outside

celebrated three triumphs and boasted the modest refusal of countless more.¹⁴⁹ In addition, he used this enacted propaganda as a weapon in his static propaganda littering the empire with symbols of Roman triumphs.

The ensuing emperors followed this same pattern: a limited number of triumphal processions that spared no expense and yet liberal use of triumphal imagery throughout the empire. For example, Tiberius celebrated a triumph over Pannonia in 12 CE. The magnificent celebration even finds its way to the ears of Ovid in exile on the Black Sea. In great detail, the estranged poet writes:

Even to this place has the fame of Caesar's triumph penetrated. . . . Thanks, Fame, to thee through whom I, prisoned among the Getae, have seen the splendor of the triumph. By thy evidence I learned that recently countless races assembled to see their leader's face; and Rome, that embraces the measureless world within her vast walls, scarce had room for her guests. Thou didst tell me . . . how the victor, honouring them with a loud voice, bestowed the warlike gifts upon the heroes he praised . . . how wherever he went, he received the happy omen of applause and the pavement blushed with dewy roses. Before him, silver counterparts of the conquered walls, barbarian towns were carried with pictured men upon them, rivers and mountains and battles in deep forests, shields and spears in a confused pile, and from the gold of the trophies kindled by the sun, the buildings of the Roman forum turned to gold. So many chieftains bore chains upon their vanquished necks that they could almost suffice to be the enemy. . . . The same report told me, Germanicus, that towns moved on under the title of thy name; that against thee they had been secure neither by massive walls nor arms nor skillful site. Gods grant thee years!¹⁵⁰

of the imperial house (traditionally the victorious general) before Augustus imposed his restriction. For similar trajectories regarding Augustus' approval of provincial imperial cult temples, see Friesen, *Imperial*, 25–29.

149 *Res gest. divi Aug.* 4. See also Dio Cass. 53.26.5; Florus 2.33.53. In Dio Cass. 55.6.5–6, Augustus rejects a triumph for himself, but appoints a triumph for Tiberius, keeping the honor in the imperial house.

150 Ovid, *Pont.* 2.1 (Wheeler, LCL).

Indeed, engraved on triumphal arches around the empire,¹⁵¹ coins in the hands of elites and non-elites alike,¹⁵² and even common dinnerware,¹⁵³ the triumphal procession was so significant that it saturated the empire. It is no surprise, then, that as Suetonius reports, Claudius attacked Britain simply because he desired “the glory of a legitimate triumph.”¹⁵⁴ Nor is it surprising that the Flavians chose precisely the Roman triumph in 71 CE to mark “the definitive announcement of the new dynasty in Rome.”¹⁵⁵

What made the Roman triumphal procession so significant was its ability to combine all three key messages into one coherent spectacle of enacted propaganda. Several features of the elaborate parade communicate this message. First, the procession of the spoils of war was a distinctive element, celebrated in the Ovid quote above, in which the plunder called attention to the glory attained in battle. In Augustus’s triumph in 29 BCE—a three-day affair to celebrate victories over Illyrium, Egypt, and the Battle of Actium—Dio Cassius recounts, “Now all the processions proved notable, thanks to the spoils from Egypt—in such quantities, indeed, had spoils been gathered there that they sufficed for all the processions—but the Egyptian celebration surpassed them all in costliness and magnificence.”¹⁵⁶

Moreover, lists of lands conquered and even depictions of key moments in the battle were interspersed throughout the procession. Describing different triumphs, Pliny lists thirty names and representations of towns and regions,¹⁵⁷ Livy describes “134 model towns,”¹⁵⁸ and Tacitus describes various

151 See Zanker, *Power*, 84 for a triumphal arch in honor of Tiberius from 26–27 CE in the city of Arausio. Dio Cass. 65.7.2 records triumphal arches under Vespasian, and for a discussion of the Arch of Titus, see pp. 153–155 below. See also Dio Cass. 54.8.3 for Augustus’s triumphal arch awarded for the retrieval of the Roman standards from the Parthians, and Waddy, *Pax*, 138 for the triumphal arch dedicated to Trajan in Timgad (ca. 100 CE).

152 See footnote 146 above.

153 Zanker, *Power*, 227–228 describes two silver cups with triumphal imagery from the time of Tiberius in Boscoreale.

154 Suet., *Claud.* 17 (Rolfe, LCL).

155 Noreña, “Medium,” 39. Josephus, *J.W.* 7.115–157. See also Alston, *Aspects*, 157, 168. For more discussion of the Flavian Roman triumph, see pp. 151–153 below.

156 Dio Cass. 51.21.7 (Cary, LCL). See also Tac., *Ann.* 2.41. Cf. Dio Cass. 67.7.4 (Cary, LCL) where Domitian is criticized for presenting spoils of war in his triumph that “came from no booty that he had captured.” For the impact on the subjects observing this parade, see Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 242; Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 148–149.

157 Pliny, *H.N.* 5.36–37.

158 Livy, *The History of Rome* 37.59.3 (Roberts).

“representations of the mountains, the rivers and battles.”¹⁵⁹ In each triumph, the lists announced the dominance of Rome as ruler of the kings of the earth.¹⁶⁰

In the Flavian Roman triumph in 71 CE, Josephus affords “the greatest surprise of all” to the magnificent depictions of “many resemblances of the war” that offered “a most lively portraiture of itself.”¹⁶¹ He details the representations:

For there was to be seen a happy country laid waste, and entire squadrons of enemies slain; while some of them ran away, and some were carried into captivity; with walls of great altitude and magnitude overthrown and ruined by machines; with the strongest fortifications taken, and the walls of most populous cities upon the tops of hills seized on, and an army pouring itself with the walls; as also every place full of slaughter, and supplication of the enemies . . . Fire also sent upon temples was here represented, and houses overthrown, and falling upon their owners. . . .¹⁶²

Josephus concludes by emphasizing the purpose of this enacted propaganda, “Now the workmanship of these representations was so magnificent and lively in the construction of the things, that it exhibited what had been done *to such as did not see it, as if they had been there really present*.”¹⁶³ Thus, these depictions did not invite the onlooker to merely view the sovereign narrative, but to participate in it.

Another significant feature of the Roman triumph was the enemy prisoners paraded amongst the plunder and depictions of their defeat. Due to its importance, both the volume and the quality of the prisoners garnered attention. So, Ovid lauds that there were “so many chieftains” chained by “their vanquished necks that they could almost suffice to be the enemy,” and Josephus narrates Fronto dividing the prisoners for Titus, in which “he chose out the tallest and most beautiful, and reserved them for the triumph.”¹⁶⁴

This portion’s popularity is evident in the amount of iconography rendering conquered barbarian prisoners, often bound in chains. The bound captive(s)

159 Tac., *Ann.* 2.41 (Church and Brodribb). See also Propertius, *Elegies* 3.4.16 and Dio Cass. 68.29.2.

160 Wengst, *Pax*, 177 reflects, “[The Romans] count their victories, not by the multitude of corpses and spoils, but by captive kingdoms, by nations enslaved, by islands and continents added to their mighty realm.”

161 Josephus, *J.W.* 7.139–142 (Whiston).

162 Ibid., 7.143–144 (Whiston).

163 Ibid., 7.146 (Whiston) [*emphasis added*].

164 Ovid, *Pont.* 2.1 (Wheeler, LCL). Josephus, *J.W.* 6.417 (Whiston).



FIGURE 3.6 *The Gemma Augustea cameo.*

PICTURE BY JAMES STEAKLEY (OCTOBER 2013). USED WITH PERMISSION AND IN PARTNERSHIP WITH WIKIMEDIA.

decorates theater curtains, temple friezes, imperial columns, ornate lamps, and coinage.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, in the lower register of the Gemma Augustea cameo (early first century CE), a bound captive sits in the left corner under the victory trophy being hoisted by four men. In the right corner, a prisoner bows in entreaty as the woman above him is dragged by the hair.

¹⁶⁵ Theater curtains: Zanker, *Power*, 326. Temple friezes: Fred S. Kleiner, *The Arch of Nero in Rome* (Rome: G. Bretschneider, 1985), 85–86; I.M. Ferris, *Enemies of Rome: Barbarians through Roman Eyes* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000), 33–35; Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 80. Imperial columns: Karl Lehmann-Hartleben, *Die Trajanssäule* (Berlin: Gruyter, 1926), 50–63. Lamps: Bradley, “Captives,” 300. Coinage: Vespasian: *RIC* 289; 424; 426; Titus: *RIC* 11; 17; Domitian: *RIC* 278a; 278b.

The critical element for the Roman triumph—exceeding the plunder, the lists of conquered lands, the depictions of battle, and the enemy soldiers—was the procession of the chief enemy leader bound in chains.¹⁶⁶ This element was so important that upon Antony's death after the Battle of Actium, Augustus grew "anxious not only to get possession of [Cleopatra's] treasures but also to seize her alive and to carry her back for his triumph."¹⁶⁷ At Cleopatra's death, Augustus "not only viewed her body" but also attempted to revive her.¹⁶⁸ When all attempts of resuscitation failed, Caesar "excessively grieved on his own account, as if he had been deprived of all the glory of his victory."¹⁶⁹ Augustus's reaction reflects the words of Velleius Paterculus, "Reports do not relate how the most eminent leaders of the enemy were slain in battle, but rather how the triumph displayed them, in chains."¹⁷⁰

Still further, the Roman triumph attributed these features to divine favor. Far from incidental, Augustus's triumph in 29 BCE coincided with the dedication of the temple of the Divine Julius, whose apotheosis is depicted on the Belvedere altar in triumphal procession imagery.¹⁷¹ Again, the procession concluded on the steps of the temple of Jupiter, at which point the key enemy leader was executed as an offering to the gods.¹⁷² Indeed, the Roman triumph was a celebration heralding the promise of the divine gift of victory.

The Roman triumph is a collision of both static and enacted propaganda melding the three key messages of the Roman sovereign narrative into one fluid experience. For the spoils of war, the geographical depictions, and the bound captives invite the viewer to partake in a world in which the Roman Empire is the ruler of the kings of the earth because they are favored by the gods, which is evident by the blessings of the universal *Pax* that are sure to follow.

166 Beard, *Triumph*, 124–125 argues that the traditional position for the key enemy leader was directly in front of the *quadriga* of the triumphant general.

167 Dio Cass. 51.11.3 (Cary, LCL). See 51.10.9 for Antony's death.

168 Dio Cass. 51.14.3 (Cary, LCL).

169 Dio Cass. 51.14.6 (Cary, LCL). See also Dio Cass. 61.32.4a (Cary, LCL) where Mithridates begs Claudius for a hearing so that "he might not be summarily executed or led in the triumphal procession." Cf. Tac., *Ann.* 12.21.

170 Vell. Pat. 2.121.3 (Shipley, LCL). Cf. Tac., *Ann.* 12.36.

171 Zanker, *Power*, 79; Mark D. Fullerton, "The Domus Augusti in Imperial Iconography of 13–12 BC" *AJA* 89.3 (1985): 482.

172 Josephus, *J.W.* 7.153. Beard, *Triumph*, 335. S.J. Hafemann, "Roman Triumph," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (eds. C. Evans and S. Porter; Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 1005.

Conclusion

The sovereign narrative of Rome proclaimed three key messages: [1] The Roman Empire is the ruler of the kings of the earth; [2] The Roman Empire is favored by the gods; and [3] The Roman Empire is the bearer of *Pax*. At locations of intersection, Rome positioned imperial billboards (both static and enacted propaganda) to saturate their subjects with the sovereign narrative—an ever-present message communicated through imagery understandable by the educated and uneducated alike.

While the Roman sovereign narrative was resisted by some¹⁷³ and at times even contradicted reality,¹⁷⁴ this analysis appreciates how the sovereigns viewed themselves (how they thought the world should be) and, consequently, the grammar with which subjects could engage in ‘points of conversation’ (whether positive or negative).¹⁷⁵ The imperial propaganda invited the empire’s subjects to participate in the sovereign narrative that presented a world in which the Roman Empire was the ruler of the kings of the earth, because they were favored by the gods, which resulted in Roman *Pax*.

173 Calgacus decries, “Robbers of the world, having by their universal plunder exhausted the land, they rifle the sea. If the enemy be rich, they are rapacious; if he be poor, they lust for dominion; neither the east nor the west has been able to satisfy them. Alone among men they covet with equal eagerness poverty and riches. To robbery, slaughter, plunder, they give the lying name of empire; they make a wasteland and call it peace” (Tac., *Agr.* 30, Church and Brodribb). Cf. 2 Esd 10:60–12:35; 1QM (‘Kittim’); *b. Šabb.* 33b. See also Wengst *Pax*, 7–11.

174 Graeme Whittington and Kevin J. Edwards, “Ubi solitudinem faciunt pacem appellant’: The Romans in Scotland, a Palaeoenvironmental Contribution,” *Britannia* 24 (1993): 20 suggest through radio-carbon dating of pollen profiles from Eastern Scotland that there was a marked regression in agricultural activity and woodland regeneration after the appearance of the Romans in the late first century CE to late second century CE in Fife and Aberdeenshire. Thus, in this region, the *Pax Romana* did not cause abundant vegetative growth but actually caused a decline.

175 As Deissmann, *Light*, 340 surmises, “It must not be supposed that St. Paul and his fellow-believers went through the world blindfolded, unaffected by what was then moving the minds of men in great cities.” See also Friesen, *Imperial*, 53–55; Deissmann, *Light*, 385; Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (HDR 9; Missoula: Scholars, 1976; repr., Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 57; Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 1, 135; Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 107, 114.

The Date of the Book of Revelation pt. 1: The External and Internal Evidence

When the Revelation is stripped of actual historical references we are tempted to conclude that it is merely an expression of a mood or an eccentric worldview and is not ‘about’ anything.¹

Revelation’s socio-historical context must be established to detect particular inflections of the imperial dialogue therein. While the Roman Empire’s sovereign narrative is an important step forward, the date of Revelation offers further clarity to the Alter-Imperial paradigm. Since the subject narrative engages the sovereign narrative through ‘points of conversation,’ the different nuances and articulations of the Roman sovereign narrative by the various emperors must be respected. Thus, Revelation’s date of composition elucidates the subject imagery’s interaction with contemporary imperial propaganda.²

There are two primary options for the date of the Apocalypse: the early-date (pre-70 CE) and the late-date (92–96 CE). Throughout the majority of the nineteenth century, the scholarly community rallied behind the pre-70 CE date for Revelation³ articulated by the Cambridge trio: F.J.A. Hort, B.F. Westcott,

1 J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 49.

2 Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (JSNTSup 11; Sheffield: JSOT, 1986; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 3; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis & Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 50, 54. *Contra* J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John’s Apocalypse* (JSNTSup 132; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1999), 34; Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 151; Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 403.

3 Adam Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdom, 1823); P.S. Desprez, *The Apocalypse Fulfilled* (2d ed.; London: Longmans, 1855); Friedrich Dürstiediek, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John* (trans. Henry E. Jacobs; 3d ed.; New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1886); William Henry Simcox, *The Revelation of St. John Divine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898); Friedrich Bleek, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (trans. William Urwick; 2 vols. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1870); Johann Heinrich Kurtz, *Church History* (trans. John MacPherson; 9d ed.; New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1888); James M. MacDonald, *The Life and Writings of St. John* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1877); Eduard Wilhelm Eugen Reuss, *History of the Sacred Scriptures of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1884); Edward C. Selwyn, *The Christian Prophets and the Prophetic Apocalypse* (London:

and J.B. Lightfoot.⁴ Generally speaking, this early-date option thought Revelation was written in response to the Neronian persecutions of the mid-60s CE and in preparation for the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. While the specific emperor varies, early-date advocates agree that the Apocalypse was written in the pre-70 CE time period.⁵

Historically, though, the early-date option was not the dominant position of the church. As David Aune points out, "From the late second century AD until the nineteenth century, and again (after the interval of a century of criticism) in the twentieth century, the prevailing opinion has been that Revelation was written toward the end of the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian."⁶ Indeed, the vast majority of modern scholars date Revelation's composition in the final years of Domitian's reign, between 92–96 CE.⁷

MacMillan, 1900); Henry C. Sheldon, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1894); Bernhard Weiss, *A Manual of Introduction to the New Testament* (trans. A.J.K. Davidson; 2 vols.; New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1889).

4 F.J.A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of John 1–111* (London: Macmillan, 1908), x; B.F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: John Murray, 1894), lxxxvi–lxxxvii; J.B. Lightfoot, *Essays on the Work Entitled Supernatural Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1889), 132; idem, *Biblical Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1893), 52.

5 For the reign of Nero, see R.B. Moberly, "When Was Revelation Conceived?," *Bib* 73.3 (1992): 376–393; R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); Lightfoot, *Supernatural Religion*; idem, *Biblical Essays*. For Galba, see C.C. Torrey, *The Apocalypse of John* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), 66; Paul Trudinger, "The 'Nero Redivivus' Rumour and the Date of the Apocalypse of John," *SMRev* (1987): 43–44; Albert A. Bell, Jr., "The Date of John's Apocalypse: The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered," *NTS* 25 (1978): 93–102; John A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 221–253; E. Lipinski, "L'apocalypse et le martyre de Jean à Jérusalem," *NovT* 11 (1969): 225–232; Eberhard Vischer, *Die Offenbarung Johannes: Eine jüdische Apokalypse in christlicher Bearbeitung* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1886); Rowland, *Heaven*, 266. For Vespasian, see Bernhard Weiss, *Manual*; Stephen S. Smalley, *Thunder and Love: John's Revelation and John's Community* (UK: Word, 1994), 69. For a redaction theory that locates the original sources in the time of John the Baptist (and shortly thereafter), see J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation* (AB 38; Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), 28–57.

6 David E. Aune, *Revelation* (3 vols.; WBC 52A–52C; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997–1998), 1:lvii. Nevertheless, Aune, *Revelation*, 1:lviii suggests the original composition was constructed earlier and a final edition was finished ca. 95–96 CE (possibly at the beginning of Trajan's reign). Writing in 1980, Böcher, *Johannesapokalypse*, 41 confidently states, "Der zeitliche Ansatz der Apokalypse vor 70 n. Chr. (Hadorn) ist heute allgemein aufgegeben. An der Entstehung in den letzten Jahren Domitians, also etwa 95 n. Chr., sollte nicht mehr gezweifelt werden."

7 Hemer, *Letters*, 3; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 17; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (New York: MacMillan, 1919; repr., Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 197, 208; H. Koester, *Introduction to New Testament*

With these options in place, this chapter examines the external and internal evidence to determine which date is most viable for Revelation's composition. The initial part inspects the early Christian witness (external evidence) followed by an analysis of the internal evidence within the Apocalypse. With this data, a tentative date is suggested.

External Evidence: Early Christian Witness

While some early testimonies differ,⁸ the early Christian witness overwhelmingly supports the late-date option of Revelation (92–96 CE), including: Clement

(2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 2:250; A.C. Isbell, "The Dating of Revelation," *ResQ* 9 (1966): 107–117; G.R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 38; D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 476; William Ramsay, "The Date of the Apocalypse," *ExpTim* 16.4 (1905): 171–174; Otto Böcher, "Johanneisches in der Apokalypse des Johannes," *NTS* 27 (1981): 318; idem, *Kirche in Zeit und Endzeit: Aufsätze zur Offenbarung des Johannes* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1983), 41; Collins, *Crisis*, 54–83; G.B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John* (BNTC 19; London: A&C Black, 1966; repr., Peabody: Hendrickson, 1966), 6; Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (New York: MacMillan, 1906; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), civ; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 9; Ben Witherington III, *Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5; J.P.M. Sweet, *Revelation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 27; Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 347; G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 27; Friesen, *Imperial*, 151; Kraybill, *Imperial*, 19 (n. 9); idem, *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), 195; Leonard Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 15; Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (NTD 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 6; Johannes Weiss, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1904), 32–33; Theodor Zahn, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (2 vols.; Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1924–1926), 1:34, 53–54. For Revelation as a redaction of two sources (69 CE and 81 CE) completed sometime in 81–117 CE, see H.J. Holtzmann, *Briefe und Offenbarung des Johannes* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1893), 303. For a Hadrianic date of Revelation, see Thomas Witulski, *Die Johannesoffenbarung und Kaiser Hadrian: Studien zur Datierung der neutestamentlichen Apokalypse* (FRLANT 221; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 48, 49, 52, 143–237.

8 Epiph., *Adv. haeres.* 51.12 (4th c. CE) suggests the reign of Claudius (41–54 CE). The introductions to the Syriac versions of the Apocalypse (5th c. CE) date the book to Nero's reign (54–68 CE). Dorotheus (6th c. CE), *Synopsis de vita et morte prophetarum* and Theophylact (11th c. CE), on *Matthew* 20:22 support a Trajanic date (98–117 CE). Regarding Theophylact, see Mounce, *Revelation*, 15.

of Alexandria (ca. 150–215/17 CE),⁹ Origen (ca. 185–254 CE),¹⁰ Victorinus of Pettau (ca. 270 CE),¹¹ Eusebius (ca. 263–339 CE),¹² Jerome (ca. 347–420 CE),¹³ and others.¹⁴ The earliest and most significant voice is Irenaeus (d. 202 CE).¹⁵

Born in ca. 125 CE in the city of Smyrna (Rev 2:8–11), Irenaeus writes in *Adversus Haereses* (ca. 180 CE) 5.30.3:

We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For it was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign.¹⁶

This statement interests both ends of the 'date of Revelation' spectrum. The late-date supporters posit this passage as evidence for Domitian's reign; the early-date advocates criticize Irenaeus on two accounts: authorship and grammar.

As first suggested by John A.T. Robinson,¹⁷ early-date advocates argue that Irenaeus' dating of Revelation is unreliable since he mistakenly equates the author of John's Gospel with Revelation's author.¹⁸ This argument is challenged

9 *Quis div.* 42 (cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.23.5–19).

10 *Comm. Matt.* 16.6. See Carson, Moo, and Morris, *Introduction*, 474; Mounce, *Revelation*, 16.

11 *Apoc.* 10.11. Cf. 17.10.

12 *Hist. eccl.* 3.17–18; 3.23.1.

13 *Vir. ill.* 9.

14 Ps-Augustine, *Quaest. Vetus et Novum Test.* 76.2.

15 The majority of scholars (both early- and late-date advocates) center on Irenaeus, often not even mentioning the existence of other external witnesses. See Thompson, *Revelation*, 15; Lohse, *Offenbarung*, 6; Caird, *Revelation*, 6; Witulski, *Johannesoffenbarung*, 34; Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 466–467; Robinson, *Redating*, 221–222; Rowland, *Heaven*, 403–404, 407; Aune, *Revelation*, 1:lviii–lx; Beale, *Revelation*, 16, 19–20; R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (1CC; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 1:xcii; Brian K. Blount, *Revelation* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 8; Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John* (BNTC 19; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006), 7–8; Mounce, *Revelation*, 16; Caird, *Revelation*, 14.

16 Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.3 (Roberts). The Greek is preserved in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.18.3 and 5.8.6.

17 Robinson, *Redating*, 222.

18 J. Christian Wilson, "The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation," *NTS* 39 (1993): 597.

with four points of clarification.¹⁹ First, the identity of the authors may have been confused due to the frequency of the name ‘John’ in the ancient world. This type of confusion, however, is drastically different than asserting the Apocalypse was composed at the end of the reign of Domitian (92–96 CE) when in fact it was written twenty-five to thirty years earlier. Such a shift has no defense. Similarly, if Irenaeus only knew of the name ‘John’ for the author of Revelation (Rev 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8), the ‘apostle’ John would not be an illogical assumption. Again, this conclusion differs significantly from the assertion that Irenaeus knew the Apocalypse was written at the end of the reign of ‘some emperor’ and then arbitrarily selected Domitian. The former follows general canonicity trajectories while the latter completely fabricates historical details.

Third, Irenaeus attributes the date to the reign of Domitian in spite of the difficulty of the apostle John’s advanced age. This adds credibility to his suggestion, even if the author happens to be mistaken. As Collins suggests, this “implies that he had independent and strong evidence for the date.”²⁰ Fourth, if complete accuracy of every detail is the litmus test for the validity of every other detail given by an ancient historian and their overall usefulness to reconstruct history, then no reliable historical works would remain in any area of study. No ancient author would be spared from such a ludicrous standard of evaluation. The ‘authorship’ objection, therefore, proves untenable and does not jettison Irenaeus as a legitimate historical authority on the dating of Revelation.

The second objection to Irenaeus refers to the grammar of *Haer.* 5.30.3 (see above). Some suggest that what “was seen” refers to John himself and not the Apocalypse. In other words, Irenaeus states that John lived to Domitian’s time, not that Revelation was written at that time. Both Latin²¹ and Greek²² texts need to be examined to establish the efficacy of this argument.

The key terms for Latin and Greek, respectively, are *visum est* and ἐωράθη. While the closest antecedent to *visum est* in the Latin is “the Apocalypse” (*apocalypsim*), the feminine ending on *apocalypsim* necessitates *visa est* if the

19 The following is indebted to lines of argumentation found in Adela Yarbro Collins, “Dating the Apocalypse of John,” *BR* 26 (1981): 33–34.

20 Collins, “Dating,” 34; idem, *Crisis*, 56.

21 Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.3: *si oporteret manifeste praesenti tempore praeconari nomen ejus, per ipsum utique dictum fuisset qui et apocalypsim viderat: neque enim ante multum temporis visum est, sed pene sub nostro saeculo ad finem Domitiani imperii.*

22 Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.18.3 quoting Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.3: εἰ δὲ ἔδει ἀναφανδὸν ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ κηρύττεσθαι τοῦνομα αὐτοῦ, δι’ ἐκείνου ἂν ἐρρέθη τοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν ἐορακότος. οὐδὲ γὰρ πρὸ πολλοῦ χρόνου ἐωράθη, ἀλλὰ σχεδὸν ἐπὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας γενεάς, πρὸς τῷ τέλει τῆς Δομετιανοῦ ἀρχῆς.

author intends to refer to the document alone.²³ A similar problem occurs if *visum est* refers to John (masculine), because the grammar demands *visus est* in order for this to be the sole referent. Instead, Aune points out that *visum est* refers to “the *nomen* of the Antichrist.”²⁴ With this referent, the Latin translates, “For [the name of the Antichrist] was seen no very long time since, but almost in our own day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign.” This Latin translation supports the late date of the Apocalypse. The “name of the Antichrist” refers to Irenaeus’ immediate context discussing the textual issue of 666 from the Apocalypse. Understanding this difficulty, J. Stolt suggests a corruption of the Latin text and, therefore, asserts, without any textual evidence, that it originally read “*visus est*.”²⁵

The ‘antecedent’ objection is also applied to the Greek ἑωράθη. The argument is that ἑωράθη does not refer to the end of Domitian’s reign as Revelation’s date but as the time in which John was living.²⁶ To such an objection, two responses can be made. First, Aune posits that the passive “he/she/it was seen” is an inappropriate way to “describe the length of a person’s life; it is much more likely that ἑωράθη means ‘it [i.e., ‘the Apocalypse’] was seen,’ referring to the time when the Apocalypse was ‘seen’ by John of Patmos.”²⁷ Significantly, John A.T. Robinson, an early-date advocate, affirms this Greek translation and the traditional reading of Irenaeus: the referent is the Apocalypse and not John.²⁸

Second, the context in which Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.17–18 quotes Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.3 (in Greek) suggests ἑωράθη refers to the Apocalypse. In *Hist. eccl.* 3.17, Eusebius describes Domitian’s cruel punishment of Rome’s “notable men.” In comparison to Nero’s persecution of the Christians, Eusebius states that Domitian “was the second to promote persecution against us” (Lake, LCL). After recording Vespasian’s absolution of any similar persecutions, Eusebius suggests that in Domitian’s persecution “the Apostle and Evangelist John was still alive, and was condemned [by Domitian] to live in the island of Patmos for his witness to the divine word.”²⁹ Eusebius then offers Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.3 as evidence for this tradition. Subsequently, Eusebius argues that Domitianic

23 Contra Beale, *Revelation*, 20.

24 Aune, *Revelation*, 1:lix; Robinson, *Redating*, 222 (n. 5).

25 J. Stolt, “Om dateringen af Apokalypsen,” *DTT* 40 (1977): 202–207.

26 Stolt, “dateringen,” 202–207; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, Tex.: ICE, 1989), 47–56; F.H. Chase, “The Date of the Apocalypse: The Evidence of Irenaeus,” *JTS* 8 (1907): 431.

27 Aune, *Revelation*, 1:lix.

28 Robinson, *Redating*, 222 (n. 5).

29 *Hist. eccl.* 3.18 (Lake, LCL). The last phrase “for his witness to the divine word” is an allusion to Rev 1:9.

persecutions are also described in non-Christian writings.³⁰ Therefore, Eusebius does not see ἐωράθη as a reference to the life-span of John; he interprets ἐωράθη as a reference to the Apocalypse received on the island of Patmos by John during a period of persecution under Domitian.³¹

Thus, there are no adequate reasons to disregard the traditional interpretation of Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.3: the book of Revelation was composed at the end of Domitian's reign.³² The evidence of the early Christian witness to the date of Revelation, therefore, is overwhelmingly in favor of the late-date tradition (92–96 CE). To quote F.J.A. Hort, an early-date proponent, "If external evidence alone could decide, there would be a clear preponderance for Domitian."³³

Internal Evidence: Attempts to Overturn the External Evidence

The early Christian witness to the late-date option could be legitimately overturned if the internal evidence decidedly concludes a different composition date. Consequently, two questions guide the analysis of Revelation's internal evidence: [1] Does the internal evidence demand a specific date? and [2] Is there enough internal evidence to overturn the late-date presented by the external evidence?³⁴ This part focuses on the three most influential texts for early-date advocates: Revelation 11:1–2; 13:18; and 17:9–11.

Revelation 11:1–2—Measuring the Temple

In Revelation 11:1–2, the Seer receives a reed and the instruction to, "Rise and measure the temple (ναόν) of God and the altar and the ones worshiping in it. But jettison the courtyard outside of the temple and do not measure it, because it was given to the nations. They will trample the holy city for 42 months."³⁵ Early-date advocates argue that this admonition to "measure the temple" is clear evidence that the Apocalypse was composed before the temple was destroyed

30 Eusebius offers the account of Flavius Clement and Flavia Domitilla as evidence (cf. Dio Cass. 67.14).

31 For discussion on Domitianic persecution, see Chapter 5 below.

32 Swete, *Apocalypse*, cvi; Collins, *Crisis*, 57; Kraybill, *Imperial*, 19 (n. 9).

33 Hort, *Apocalypse*, xx. See also Charles, *Revelation*, 1:xcii; Rowland, *Heaven*, 403–404—an early-date advocate.

34 Wilson, "Problem," 597 ebulliently exclaims, "The abundance of internal evidence to the contrary clearly outweighs the opinion of Irenaeus." See also Robinson, *Redating*, 221.

35 Unless otherwise noted, all New Testament citations are my own translations from the Greek text NA²⁸.

(i.e., pre-70 CE).³⁶ From this perspective, this text not only confirms the book's early date but also the book's purpose: to prepare the Christian community for the imminent destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.³⁷ Nevertheless, four lines of argumentation suggest a different conclusion to the imagery.

First, in Revelation, temple (ναός) imagery always refers to a heavenly temple accessible only to God and his faithful followers (including angels). In Revelation 3:12, the church in Philadelphia is told, "I will make the one conquering (ὁ νικῶν) a pillar in the temple (ναῦ) of my God [in heaven]." In 7:15, the great multitude in heaven worship before the throne of God "day and night in his [heavenly] temple (ναῦ)." After the seventh trumpet in 11:19 (the same chapter as the text in question), "the temple (ναός) of God in heaven" is opened revealing the ark of his covenant. Again, in 14:15, 17 and 15:5, 6, 8, the temple is specifically labeled as being in heaven (14:17; 15:5), but this time, angels emerge from it with commands (14:15) and tools (15:6) for judgment. In 16:1, a "loud voice" comes from the same heavenly temple commanding the seven angels to pour out the seven bowls of judgment on the earth. After the final bowl (16:17), the same voice from the heavenly temple (16:1) declares, "It is done!" Finally, ναός occurs in Revelation 21:22 in reference to the new heaven and the new earth: "I did not see a temple (ναόν) in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple (ναός)."

In Revelation, ναός consistently designates a 'heavenly' temple only accessible to God and his faithful followers (including angels). If Revelation 11:1–2, then, refers to a temple on earth in the city of Jerusalem before its destruction in 70 CE, it would be anomalous at best and careless at worst. Instead, the temple in Revelation 11:1–2 should be regarded with the same definition of ναός found everywhere else in the Apocalypse: a heavenly temple only accessible to God and his faithful followers (including angels).³⁸

36 So Robinson, *Redating*, 238–242; Robert A. Briggs, *Jewish Temple Imagery in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 24. However, Rowland, *Heaven*, 429, an early-date advocate, concludes, "John is not here [Rev 11:1–2] dealing with an actual building but the temple as a symbol of a greater reality."

37 Westcott, *Gospel*, lxxxvii. Cf. Craig S. Keener, *Revelation* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 36; Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 122–126.

38 For further discussion, see Beale, *Revelation*, 557–571; Caird, *Revelation*, 130–132; Collins, "Dating," 37; Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (HNT 16; Tübingen: Mohr, 1970), 91; Lohse, *Offenbarung*, 65; Zahn, *Offenbarung*, 2:422–424; Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse* (Boston: Beacon, 1963; repr., Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 294; Boxall, *Revelation*, 160–161; Richard Bauckham, *The Climax*

Second, the predominant parallel to the imagery of Revelation 11:1–2 is Ezekiel 40–48.³⁹ In the preceding contexts of these two passages, both seers are commanded to eat a scroll (Ezek 3:1–3; Rev 10:9)⁴⁰ and to deliver a prophetic message to God’s people (Ezek 3:4; Rev 10:11). After a symbolic action communicates the message in both passages,⁴¹ a striking shift occurs between the two texts. In Ezekiel 4:1–17, the prophet constructs a representation of Jerusalem under siege, foreshadowing the proclamations of impending judgment on the city (Ezek 5–12) and the destruction of the temple.⁴² The logical progression for the imagery and language of Revelation 11:1–2, then, would seem to parallel Ezekiel 4 and the context that follows (i.e., the siege and destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem). This progression would strongly support the early-date interpretation and purpose of Revelation: to prepare Christians for the siege and destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem (66–70 CE). But instead, John’s language and imagery in Revelation 11:1–2 parallels Ezekiel 40–48.

In both passages, the temple is measured (μετρέω—Rev 11:1; Ezek 40:3b [LXX]) by an agent of God (an angelic figure in Ezek 40:5bf. and John in Rev 11:1). Both agents are given a “reed” (κάλαμος—Rev 11:1a; Ezek 40:3b [LXX]) as the measuring device for the temple. In both passages, the measuring of the temple communicates the security and safety provided by God’s presence.⁴³ Significantly, in Ezekiel 40–48, the temple’s measurement is envisioned when no temple in Jerusalem existed; it had been destroyed for over a decade.⁴⁴ So why would Revelation 11:1–2 bypass Ezekiel 4 and instead parallel Ezekiel 40–48? The answer to this question comes in another parallel with Ezekiel: John is told to measure the temple at a time when the temple did not exist.⁴⁵

Third, the title “the holy city” (τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν) in Revelation 11:2 distinguishes this image from “the great city” (τῆς πόλεως τῆς μεγάλης) in 11:8,

of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation (London: T&T Clark, 1993), 272; Mounce, *Revelation*, 215.

39 See Beale, *Revelation*, 559; Ford, *Revelation*, 168, 173; Boxall, *Revelation*, 159–160; Mounce, *Revelation*, 213–214.

40 Rev 10:9b, “... in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey” (ἐν τῷ στόματί σου ἔσται γλυκὺ ὡς μέλι) and Ezek 3:3b, “... in my mouth it was as sweet as honey” (LXX = ἐν τῷ στόματί μου ὡς μέλι γλυκάζον).

41 Bauckham, *Climax*, 267.

42 Ezek 33:21–22; Jer 52:1–30; Dan 1:1–2.

43 See Rev 21:15–17, 27; 2 Sam 8:2; Isa 28:16–17; Jer 31:38–40; Zech 1:16; Ezek 43:1–12.

44 Ezek 40:1; 33:21–22; Jer 52:1–30; Dan 1:1–2.

45 Mark L. Hitchcock, “A Critique of the Preterist View of the Temple in Revelation 11:1–2,” *BSac* 164 (2007): 235 (n. 74).

referring to Jerusalem. Specifically, “the great city” connotes rebelliousness against God whereas “the holy city” indicates faithfulness. In 16:19, the seventh bowl is poured out and “the great city” (ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη) splits into three parts collapsing the “cities of the nations.” The next phrase is, “Babylon the Great was remembered by God who gave her the wine cup of his fury and wrath.” Rebellious Babylon and “the great city” are connected throughout the Apocalypse. In 17:18, the harlot is defined as “the great city” (ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη) and in 18:10, 16, and 18 the kings of the earth, the merchants, and the seamen all lament, “Woe, woe, the great city (ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη), Babylon the strong city!”⁴⁶ Climactically, in 18:21, a mighty angel proclaims everlasting judgment on “Babylon the great city (ἡ μεγάλη πόλις).” While the city differs in Revelation 11:8 (“... the great city [τῆς πόλεως τῆς μεγάλης] which is symbolically called Sodom and Egypt, *where also their Lord was crucified*”),⁴⁷ rebellion against God is still present.

The moniker “the holy city,” however, carries the opposite meaning: faithfulness to God. After Revelation 11:2, the title is found in Revelation 21:2, “And I saw the holy city (τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν), the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God having been prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” Again, in 21:10, John describes, “And [the angel] showed me the holy city (τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν), Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” The final occurrence of “the holy city” is in 22:19, “And if anyone might take away from the words of this book of prophecy, God will take away his share of the tree of life and the holy city (τῆς πόλεως τῆς ἁγίας)... ” Thus, every occurrence of “the holy city” connotes intimacy and faithfulness to God in contradistinction to the rebelliousness of “the great city.”

The incongruity of these two titles throughout Revelation suggests a sharp distinction between the image of 11:2 (“the holy city”) and the image of 11:8 (“the great city”). Since 11:8 clearly states that “the great city” is “where also their Lord was crucified” (i.e., Jerusalem), “the holy city” in 11:2 is not the city of Jerusalem. This further deteriorates the early-date assertion that Revelation 11:1–2 mandates a standing temple in the city of Jerusalem on the precipice of siege and destruction at the time of Revelation’s composition.

Fourth, disregarding the previous three arguments, even if Revelation 11:1–2 referred to the temple’s destruction, why would this necessitate a shift in Revelation’s date? For example, Revelation 12 depicts a pregnant woman crying

46 Rev 18:10. Rev 18:16, 18 each begin with “Woe, woe, the great city...” but do not include “Babylon the strong city,” although the referent is still Babylon. In Rev 18:18, the seamen ask, “What city is like the great city?”

47 *Emphasis added.*

out in pain about to give birth (12:2). Her child, whom the dragon rapaciously awaits (12:4b), is identified as the Messiah in 12:5: “And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron rod.”⁴⁸ This portrayal of Jesus’ birth, however, does not demand a date for the Apocalypse around the trek to Bethlehem.⁴⁹ Similarly, if Revelation 11:1–2 does depict the destruction of the temple, which is unlikely, a date change is still not necessary.⁵⁰

*Revelation 13:17b–18—666 and Emperor Nero*⁵¹

A second key text for early-date advocates is Revelation 13:17b–18.⁵² In this text, the enigmatic number 666 is equated to “the name of the beast or the number of its name.”⁵³ Following other scholars,⁵⁴ early-date supporters link 666 to ‘Caesar Nero’ through gematria. Transliterating the Greek form of ‘Caesar Neron’ into Hebrew (קסר נרון),⁵⁵ the numerical value of each Hebrew letter is added together resulting in 666.⁵⁶ While many other names have been proposed for 666 throughout history,⁵⁷ a textual variant for 666 bolsters the viability of ‘Caesar Nero.’

48 Cf. Ps 2:9; Rev 19:15. See Mounce, *Revelation*, 234; Charles, *Revelation*, 1:320; cf. Boxall, *Revelation*, 180–181; Blount, *Revelation*, 230–231; Kovacs and Rowland, *Revelation*, 134–137.

49 J. Ritchie Smith, “The Date of the Apocalypse,” *BSac* 45 (1888): 308.

50 For the basis of Rev 11:1–2 as a Jewish source from the events leading up to 70 CE, see Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 37–38, 176–177; A.S. Peake, *The Revelation of John* (London: Holorn Press, n.d.), 291–292; Charles, *Revelation*, 1:270–271, 273–278.

51 For a more detailed discussion, see Shane J. Wood, “Simplifying the Number of the Beast (Rev 13:18): An Interpretation of 666 and 616,” in *Dragons, John, and Every Grain of Sand: Essays on the Book of Revelation* (ed. Shane J. Wood; Joplin, Mo.: College, 2011), 131–140.

52 Mark Wilson, “The Early Christians in Ephesus and the Date of Revelation, Again,” *Neot* 39.1 (2005): 185; Trudinger, “Nero Redivivus,” 44; Wilson, “Problem,” 598; Bell, “Date,” 98.

53 13:17; cf. 15:2.

54 Thompson, *Revelation*, 41; Kraybill, *Apocalypse*, 65; Lohse, *Offenbarung*, 83; Holtzmann, *Offenbarung*, 297; Weiss, *Offenbarung*, 22, 34–35; Ford, *Revelation*, 226; Boxall, *Revelation*, 198–199; Blount, *Revelation*, 261–262; Bauckham, *Climax*, 384–407; Caird, *Revelation*, 174–175; Charles, *Revelation*, 1:367; Mounce, *Revelation*, 262.

55 For the legitimacy of this gematria methodology, see William Barclay, “Great Themes of the New Testament: V. Revelation xiii (*continued*),” *ExpTim* 70.10 (1959): 296; Francis X. Gumerlock, “Nero Antichrist: Patristic Evidence for the Use of Nero’s Naming in Calculating the Number of the Beast (Rev 13:18),” *WTJ* 68 (2006): 359 (n. 46).

56 The numerical value of each letter is: א = 6; ב = 50; ג = 60; ד = 100; ה = 200.

57 William G. Baines, “The Number of the Beast in Revelation 13:18,” *HeyJ* 16 (1975): 195–96, suggests Vespasian (69–79 CE), adding a coin’s abbreviations: Imp Caes Vesp Aug P M Cos IIII. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1970), 960 (n. 1) offers Trajan (98–117 CE) whose surname ‘Ulpus’ has the value of 666. Still, Ethelbert

The number 666 is found in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts.⁵⁸ However, two other numbers emerge in the manuscript corpus: 665⁵⁹ and 616.⁶⁰ While 665 has been sufficiently dismissed through scribal error,⁶¹ the 616 tradition is more difficult to jettison. First, early attestation for 616 is quite strong. In addition to the late 3rd c. CE to early 4th c. CE document known as p115,⁶² Irenaeus acknowledges the existence of the 616 tradition *ca.* 180 CE. After describing 666, Irenaeus writes:

I do not know how it is that some have erred following the ordinary mode of speech, and have vitiated the middle number in the name, deducting the amount of fifty from it, so that instead of six decads they will have it that there is but one. . . . Others then received this reading without examination; some in their simplicity, and upon their own responsibility, making use of the number expressing one decad. . . .⁶³

Although Irenaeus considers 616 erroneous and spurious, he demonstrates its strong tradition even at the time of his writing. In light of this evidence, J.N. Birdsall concludes, "The reading 616 at 13,18 is, then, ancient and widespread."⁶⁴

Thus, any interpretation of 666 that cannot also explain the 616 variant should not be considered a viable option. The 'Caesar Neron' option accounts for both numbers: 666 (as seen above) and 616. The Latin form of 'Caesar Neron' is rendered 'Caesar Nero.' If this moniker is transliterated into Hebrew (קסר נר), the numerical value equals 616. So, 'Caesar Nero' can explain both 666 and 616. This conclusion leads early-date advocates to suggest that Revelation cryptically gives the modern audience a clue to its date through

Stauffer, "666," in *Coniectanea Neotestamentica* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1947), 237–241 argues that the Greek uncial titles of Domitian (81–96 CE) abbreviated on some coins as A KAI ΔOMET ΣΕΒ ΓΕ add up to 666. See Barclay, "Great Themes," 296 for other figures in modern history.

58 666 is found in: $\aleph$; A; $\mathfrak{P}^{47}$ 051 fam 1611^{1611 2329} Andreas Byzantine; 025 fam 1611¹⁸⁵⁴, with only minor spelling differences in these manuscripts.

59 665 is found in: fam 1611²³⁴⁴.

60 616 is found in: C arm⁴ Tyc² p115 (*P.Oxy.* 4499).

61 Beale, *Revelation*, 719 (n. 298).

62 For this document's dating, see J.N. Birdsall, "Irenaeus and the Number of the Beast: Revelation 13,18," in *New Testament Textual Criticism and Exegesis* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 349.

63 *Haer.* 5.30.1 (Roberts).

64 Birdsall, "Irenaeus," 352. See also Zahn, *Offenbarung*, 2:469–478.

the ‘mark of the beast.’ Nevertheless, the ‘Caesar Nero(n)’ interpretation of the beast’s number is inadequate for at least five reasons.

First, no early church documents interpret 666 as ‘Caesar Nero’ or even just ‘Nero.’ In fact, David Brady concludes that this option “appears originally to have been suggested independently by four German scholars, each claiming priority.”⁶⁵ These four scholars wrote from 1831–1837, which makes the development of this option quite late.

Second, while there is early testimony of Nero as the cipher of 616, the methodology drastically differs from the Latin ‘Caesar Nero’ option above. In *ca.* 438 CE, the *Liber Genealogus* document solves the 616 cipher by adding up the numerical value of the letters in the Latin word for ‘Antichrist’ (= 154) and then multiplying by four, since Nero has four letters in his Latin name. The number acquired is 616. Thus, Nero was referred to as a solution for 616 at a somewhat early date (5th c. CE), but the methodology is significantly different from the modern Nero option.⁶⁶

Third, the ‘Caesar Nero’ option does not explain why 616 (a more difficult reading) would occur later than 666 (a less difficult reading). It only offers another name, among many, to explain the enigmatic number through creative manipulation. No explanation is offered for why a ‘Latin-name-for-Nero’ interpretation (616) arises so early in contrast to a ‘Greek-name-for-Nero’ interpretation (666). The suggestion of an interpretative possibility for 616 does not show *why* 616 exists as a variant at all.⁶⁷

Fourth, why would Revelation use an honorific title (‘Caesar’) for Nero in a cipher? If it is a cryptic description of Nero only discernible to the Christian community, then why call him ‘King Nero’ instead of ‘Infidel Nero,’ ‘Donkey Nero,’ or some other pejorative label? The honorific ‘Caesar Nero’ for 666 (or 616) is awkward at best and counterproductive at worst given the overall trajectory of the book thus far, not to mention the material that follows.

Fifth, disregarding the previous four arguments, even if 666 (616) refers to Nero, why would this necessitate a shift in Revelation’s date? As in the case of Revelation 11:1–2, a reference to a past event (like Jesus’ birth in Revelation 12) does not demand a date concurrent with the historical allusion. Thus, if

65 David Brady, *The Contribution of British Writers Between 1560 and 1830 to the Interpretation of Revelation 13.16–18* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 292.

66 This does not mean that the modern option is incorrect, but that the modern option is just that: modern.

67 Another possible solution to the 666/616 conundrum is the Greek word for ‘beast’ (θηρίον) and its genitive form (θηρίου). See Wood, “Simplifying,” 138–140.

Revelation 13:18 does allude to 'Caesar Nero(n),' which is unlikely, a date change is still not necessary.⁶⁸

Revelation 17:9–11—The Seven Kings

In Revelation 17, the Seer is invited to view the punishment of the great harlot (17:1). John is carried away in the Spirit to the desert where the harlot is seated on a beast with seven heads and ten horns (17:3–4). Written on the woman's forehead is "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes and the abominations of the earth" (17:5). Astonished at the sight (17:6b), John, like other apocalyptic visionaries, receives an explanation from the attendant angel (17:7). In Revelation 17:9–11, the angel states:

This calls for a mind having wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills where the woman sits. And they are seven kings: five fell, one is, the other has not yet come. And when he comes, it is necessary for him to stay a little while. And the beast, who was and now is not, is an eighth [king]. He is from the seven and goes to destruction.

Despite manifold interpretative proposals, early-date advocates designate these three verses as "the crux of the problem"⁶⁹ and "*the* leading objective evidence for Revelation's date of composition."⁷⁰

The early-date perspective asks two primary questions of this text: [1] With which emperor should the list of 'seven kings' begin? and [2] Should the list include Galba, Otho, and Vitellius? Once the initial question is answered, the five 'fallen' emperors (17:10a) are counted, and contingent upon the answer to the second question, the emperor that 'is' (17:10b) is selected, which ostensibly gives Revelation's date. The answers to these two questions divide the early-date advocates into three 'reigning emperor' categories: Nero (54–68 CE), Galba (8 June 68–15 January 69 CE), and Vespasian (69–79 CE).

68 Weiss, *Offenbarung*, 22. In addition, the identification of 666 (616) with a Roman Emperor reduces the symbol of the 'beast(s)' down to the Roman Empire alone. The beast imagery in Revelation, however, far exceeds the Roman Empire in its scope and application. For discussion on Rome's relationship with the beast imagery, see Chapter 7 below.

69 Bell, "Date," 97.

70 Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Beast of Revelation* (Powder Springs, Ga.: American Vision, 2002), 137 [his *emphasis*]. Wilson, "Early Christians," 170–171 offers a helpful chart listing six different interpretative categories for this passage. Incredibly, these six categories are still an oversimplification of the variations within each category. See also Hort, *Apocalypse*, xxvi; Robinson, *Redating*, 242–248; Rowland, *Heaven*, 403.

Some early-date proponents begin their list of 'seven kings' with Julius Caesar based on the precedent set by Suetonius in the *Lives of the Caesars*, *Sib. Or.* 5.12–51, and 2 Esd 11–12.⁷¹ With this starting point, the last of the five fallen kings is Claudius (41–54 CE) and Nero is the sixth king who 'is.' The answer to the second question divides this camp into two additional groups: (1) those who see Galba as the seventh king 'to come'⁷² and (2) those who see Vespasian as the seventh king 'to come.'⁷³

Other early-date proponents reject Julius Caesar as the starting point and appeal to Tacitus *Hist.* 1.1, which, some say, presents Augustus as the first emperor.⁷⁴ With this starting point, the last of the five fallen kings is Nero, but the sixth king is only determined by the answer to the second question: Should the list include Galba, Otho, and Vitellius? If the answer to this question is 'yes,' then Galba is the sixth king that 'is' and Otho is the seventh king 'to come.'⁷⁵ If the answer to this question is 'no,' then Vespasian is the sixth king that 'is' and Titus is the seventh king 'to come.'⁷⁶

These three emperor options for early-date advocates (i.e., [1] Nero, [2] Galba, or [3] Vespasian) are addressed in reverse order, starting with the least supported option (Vespasian). While some of the objections to the Galba option could be leveled as well, the primary point of contention for the Vespasian option is the answer to the second question: Should the list include Galba, Otho, and Vitellius? If it is more viable to include these three 'civil war' emperors in the list, then the Vespasian option suffers as a legitimate conclusion.

The primary argument for the omission of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius comes from the phrase in Suetonius, *Vesp.* 1 that regards them as "rebels in a revolution" (*rebellione trium principum*) instead of emperors in power. Suetonius's point, however, is not to discredit the legality of their reign as justified emperors but

71 See also Josephus, *Ant.* 18.2.2; 18.6.10; and 19.1.11.

72 J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (2 vols.; London: MacMillan, 1889–90), 509.

73 Ford, *Revelation*, 290; S. Giet, *L'Apocalypse et l'histoire* (Paris: University of France, 1957), 54.

74 Bell, "Date," 93–102; Rowland, *Heaven*, 404; Charles, *Revelation*, 2:69.

75 So Robinson, *Redating*, 243; Bell, "Date," 100; Trudinger, "Nero Redivivus," 44; and Rowland, *Heaven*, 403–413. Oftentimes either the eighth king (Vitellius) is not discussed for this option or, as Trudinger, "Nero Redivivus," 44 states, "Because the current emperor at the time of writing ('one is' 17:10), Galba, was at death's door, and Nero had not yet returned, the writer made the very understandable prediction that the seventh emperor ('one is yet to come') would not reign for long. Then after him would come an eighth who was *also one of the seven*. This would be Nero, in the writer's mind; *Nero redivivus*, returning to cause havoc and persecution about which the writer is warning his faithful Christian readers."

76 So Smalley, *Thunder*, 42–50, 69; Holtzmann, *Offenbarung*, 300; Charles, *Revelation*, 2:69.

to describe the instability of the Roman Empire during the tumultuous period of their legitimate reign.⁷⁷ There is no indication that Suetonius considered these three rulers as anything less than emperors of Rome. Indeed, all three are featured in individual chapters in Suetonius's book entitled *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*.

This affirmation of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius is not unique to Suetonius. As Albert Bell remarks, "No ancient writer of whom I have knowledge omits these three men from his account of Roman history."⁷⁸ For instance, 2 Esd 11:1–12:3, an apocalypse written in the reign of Domitian, depicts an eagle-like beast emerging from the sea with twelve wings and three heads (11:1). In the vision's interpretation (12:10–51), this eagle is identified as the fourth kingdom of Daniel and symbolizes the Roman Empire (12:11). The twelve wings of the eagle stand for twelve successive kings that reign "one after another" (12:14, Charlesworth). Usually the second king, who reigns "for a longer time than any other of the twelve" (12:15, Charlesworth), is interpreted as Augustus who reigned for almost 42 years (27 BCE–14 CE)—the second longest is Tiberius at about 23 years (14 CE–37 CE). In 12:22–28, the eagle's 'three heads,' also a part of the twelve wings, are interpreted as the Flavian dynasty. Consequently, the twelve emperors in this vision contain Galba, Otho, and Vitellius just like Suetonius's account of *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*.⁷⁹

Still further, Eutropius (*Breviarium ab urbe condita* 7.12, 16–18) includes the three emperors, Plutarch (*Galb.* 27.6) states that the Senate declared these rulers *καὶ Καίσαρα καὶ Σεβαστόν*, and even numismatic evidence from seven different cities in Asia Minor confirm that these rulers were recognized across the empire as the emperors of Rome.⁸⁰ Thus, there is no historically viable reason to omit Galba, Otho, and Vitellius from the list of Roman emperors, thereby casting significant doubt on the Vespasian option for early-date advocates.

Identifying Galba as the king who 'is' (Rev 17:10) falters through two lines of argumentation. First, this option begins with Augustus following Tacitus (*Hist.* 1.1; *Annals* 1.1) who ostensibly omits Julius Caesar because he ruled before

77 Adela Yarbro Collins, "Myth and History in the Book of Revelation: The Problem of its Date," in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith* (ed. Baruch Halpern and Jon D. Levenson; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 387.

78 Bell, "Date," 99.

79 In fact, the civil war and distress of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius's time is referenced in 12:18, "In the midst of the time of that kingdom great struggles shall arise, and it shall be in danger of falling; nevertheless it shall not fall then, but shall regain its former power" (cf. Suet., *Vesp.* 1). *Sib. Or.* 5.12–51 also includes Galba, Otho, and Vitellius as emperors.

80 For a discussion of the numismatic evidence, see Wilson, "Early Christians," 173 who relies heavily on A. Burnett, M. Amandry, and P.P. Ripollès, *Roman Provincial Coinage*, 2 vols. (London: British Museum Press, 1992).

the imperial power was “concentrated in the hands of one man” (Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.1, Church and Brodribb). Adela Yarbro Collins, after demonstrating that Tacitus designates both Julius and Augustus as “the Caesars” (*Ann.* 4.34) and then lists them as “masters of the empire” (*Ann.* 13.3), retorts:

Tacitus is making a critical judgment about Roman historians and not defining the beginning of the empire as such. . . . Tacitus’ failure to mention [Julius Caesar] in this context may be due simply to the fact that his rule was too short to be of significance for the practical matter Tacitus is discussing. Furthermore, Tacitus does not begin his own history with Augustus, but with Galba.⁸¹

In addition, Josephus, *Ant.* 18.32 refers to Annius Rufus (Prefect of Judea from 12 BCE–15 CE), as ruling at the time of Augustus’ death, “the second emperor of the Romans” (Whiston).⁸² Similarly, *Sib. Or.* 5.12–15, 2 Esd 12:15 (see above), and Suetonius, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars* all refer to Julius Caesar as the first emperor. To deny Julius Caesar as the first emperor from an inferred reference in Tacitus in lieu of the other historical witnesses to the contrary is historically dubious. Therefore, the early-date option beginning with Augustus suffers from this significant omission.

Second, historical oddities compound if “the Apocalypse was written between June 68 and 15 January 69, when Galba was killed (or a few weeks later, assuming that news would be slow to reach John on his island retreat).”⁸³ This timetable offers the Apocalypse an applicable life span of twenty-seven months.⁸⁴ To exclude from this time period the exile of John to Patmos, it must be assumed that Nero exiled him, although no historical evidence exists.⁸⁵ Furthermore, this begs the question, ‘Why would Nero kill Peter and Paul—a Roman citizen—but only exile John within the same time period?’ This oddity increases in light of Nero’s cruelty to Christians during this period.⁸⁶ Although other objections could be raised,⁸⁷ these two lines of argumentation

81 Collins, “Myth and History,” 386.

82 Josephus, *Ant.* 18.224 also labels Caligula as the fourth emperor.

83 Bell, “Date,” 100.

84 With the temple destroyed in September 70 CE, a twenty-seven month life span assumes John completes writing the document in June 68 CE (Galba’s accession) and begins circulation the same month.

85 Cf. Iren., *Haer.* 5.30.3; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.18.1–3; 3.20.9; 3.23.1.

86 See Tac., *Ann.* 15.38, 44.

87 For other examples, see Beale, *Revelation*, 22.

sufficiently conclude that the Galba option for Revelation 17:9–11 is inadequate to overturn the early Christian witness to a late date.

Nero as the sixth king (17:10b) avoids some of the pitfalls of the previous two options—it includes Galba, Otho, and Vitellius⁸⁸ and it begins with Julius Caesar as the first emperor. Nevertheless, the Nero option suffers from the presence of the Nero myth in Revelation. At some point after Nero's suicide on 9 June 68 CE,⁸⁹ rumors circulated that Nero had either not died and escaped to the East to wait for the opportune time to return to his throne (*redux*) or, even more audacious, that he died but would resurrect with the same result (*redivivus*).⁹⁰ In the decades that followed, three different figures claimed to be a recovered Nero (*redux*): [1] 69 CE in the reign of Vitellius,⁹¹ [2] ca. 80 CE in the reign of Titus,⁹² and [3] ca. 89 CE in the reign of Domitian.⁹³

While all three figures claimed to be Nero, none of them claimed to be a resurrected Nero (*redivivus*) but a Nero who did not commit suicide and has now returned (*redux*).⁹⁴ In fact, Adela Yarbro Collins writes:

It is important to note that in the references to the Nero legend in the Greek and Latin authors there is no indication that the legend involved the return of Nero from the dead. The presupposition of this form of the legend was that Nero had not in fact died, but was living somewhere in secrecy, preparing to regain power . . . the persistence of the belief is not surprising since Nero was only 31 or 32 when he died in 68.⁹⁵

As time passed, the Nero *redivivus* tradition would likely increase, given that a longer period of time would necessitate a *redivivus* and not simply a *redux*.

Revelation 13:3, 12, 14; and 17:9–11 describe both Nero *redux* and *redivivus* myths for the beast from the sea. Revelation 13:3 portrays a “blow of death” (ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου) to a head of the beast. After a miraculous healing

88 Otho as the eighth king ‘to come’ is a bit difficult given his reign only lasts three months (15 January 69–16 April 69 CE).

89 Suet., *Nero* 49.1–4.

90 Tac., *Hist.* 2.8–9; Augustine, *Civ.* 20.19.3; *Sib. Or.* 4.119–124; 5.28–34, 93–110, 137–154, 214–227, 361–384; cf. Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 21.10.

91 Tac., *Hist.* 2.8–9.

92 Dio Cass. 66.19.3. Cf. Tac., *Hist.* 1.2.

93 Suet., *Nero* 57.2.

94 Wilson, “Problem,” 599.

95 Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (HDR 9; Missoula: Scholars, 1976; repr., Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 174–183 (esp. 177). See also Kraybill, *Imperial*, 161; Thompson, *Revelation*, 183.

(ἐθεραπεύθη), the “whole earth” is astonished and follows the beast.⁹⁶ The same language for this apparent *redivivus* is found in 13:12 (ἐθεραπεύθη ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ), but Revelation 13:14 describes the infliction of the beast with the more ambiguous πληγὴν τῆς μαχαίρης (“blow of the sword”). In spite of this blow, the beast still lived (καὶ ἔζησεν—13:14b), suggesting a possible *redux*. Furthermore, scholars agree that the source for the language and imagery of the eighth king to come in Revelation 17:9–11 is the Nero myth.⁹⁷

The Nero myth in Revelation (both *redux* and *redivivus*) presents significant problems for the Nero option. Indeed, the myths of Nero’s return or resurrection must be preceded by his death (or mysterious escape). Since the Nero myth is found in the Apocalypse, how can Nero be the king who ‘is’ at the time of Revelation’s composition? Furthermore, the existence of the Nero *redivivus* myth in Revelation indicates a later date, in that all three Nero pretenders claimed *redux* and not *redivivus*.⁹⁸

Still further, all three options (Vespasian, Galba, and Nero) share the same methodological flaw: counting emperors.⁹⁹ Like other apocalyptic

96 Emphatically, Weiss, *Offenbarung*, 140 remarks, “Das [Rev 13:3] kann sich nur auf den wieder ins Leben zurückgekehrten Nero-Domitian beziehen.”

97 Collins, “Dating,” 36; idem, *Crisis*, 59–60; idem, *Combat Myth*, 175; idem, “Myth and History,” 383; Wilson, “Early Christians,” 171; Beale, *Revelation*, 23; Swete, *Apocalypse*, ci; Aune, *Revelation*, 1:1xi; Keener, *Revelation*, 36; Bauckham, *Climax*, 430–440; Robinson, *Redating*, 243; Thompson, *Revelation*, 13; Holtzmann, *Offenbarung*, 300, 350; Weiss, *Offenbarung*, 26–27; Charles, *Revelation*, 2:70–71; Caird, *Revelation*, 219; Boxall, *Revelation*, 246. The reference to the “kings of the East” on the other side of the Euphrates (Rev 16:12) accentuates the Nero myth in Revelation. The Parthians, dwelling just east of the Euphrates, were prominent in the Nero ‘return’ rumors and even harbored the third Nero pretender for a time (Tac., *Hist.* 1.2; Suet., *Nero* 57.2). See Collins, *Combat Myth*, 220.

98 Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 207; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 38; Friesen, *Imperial*, 136; Thompson, *Revelation*, 14; Collins, *Crisis*, 59, 71; Weiss, *Offenbarung*, 140.

99 There are several late-date advocates (Weiss, *Offenbarung*, 32–33) that acquiesce to this same methodology (i.e., counting emperors). For modified counting methodologies that select different emperors as starting points for different reasons (e.g., Christ’s death, imperial cult development, Christian persecution, etc.) and include/exclude various emperors for various reasons, see John M. Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), 126–128; E.B. Allo, *Saint Jean: L’Apocalypse* (3d ed.; Paris: Gabalda, 1933), 281; Fiorenza, *Vision*, 97; A. Strobel, “Abfassung und Geschichtstheologie der Apokalypse nach Kap. XVII.9–12,” *NTS* 10 (1963–64): 433–445; Victorinus, *Apoc.* 17.2; Oecumenius, *Apoc.* 17.9–14; Collins, *Crisis*, 64, 71; Collins, “Myth and History,” 389; Friesen, *Imperial*, 140–141. For the counting of kingdoms instead of emperors, see Andreas of Caesarea, *Apoc.* 17.10; Zahn, *Offenbarung*, 2:562–566; Mark L. Hitchcock, “A Critique of the Preterist View of Revelation 17:9–11 and Nero,” *BSac* 164 (2007): 481–484; G.E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the*

texts,¹⁰⁰ Revelation communicates through symbolic imagery, especially symbolic numbers.¹⁰¹ In addition to the wide array of numbers throughout Revelation,¹⁰² the number seven is used fifty-five times.¹⁰³ In Jewish literature,

Revelation of John (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 229; William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1940; repr. 2004), 229. In addition, Sweet, *Revelation*, 23–24 and Charles, *Revelation*, 2:58–61 view Rev 17:9–11 as a pre-70 CE source used by the Apocalypse during Domitian's reign. For the view that John antedates Revelation through this imagery, see André Feuillet, *L'Apocalypse: état de la question* (Paris: Desclée, 1963), 92–93; cf. Witulski, *Johannesoffenbarung*, 338.

- 100 A document's genre should govern interpretative methodologies. For instance, Suetonius, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars* is a completely different genre than the Apocalypse. The former communicates history through lists, chronologies, and significant events; the latter communicates a subject narrative through symbolic imagery characteristic of apocalyptic literature. Therefore, different questions and interpretative methodologies are appropriate for Suetonius that are inappropriate for Revelation. Some suggest 2 Esd 11–12 legitimates the counting methodology in Rev 17:9–11, but Collins, "Myth and History," 385 retorts: "If the vision has any interest in completeness, it is expressed in these two series of wings. The heads, on the other hand, represent three emperors selected from the total list. The descriptions of the heads (2 Esd 11:29–32, 12:22–28) indicate that they stand for Vespasian, Titus and Domitian. It is quite clear then that these three emperors are represented both by three of the twelve major wings and by the three heads. The use of imagery in 2 Esdras, however, does not support the assumption that the seven heads of Revelation 17 represent all the emperors of Rome up to the actual or supposed time of writing. If there is an analogy between the two, the ten horns might be taken as a complete list of emperors and the seven heads as a selection. But the similarity between the two should not be pressed, and one cannot assume that the author of Revelation was following the example of 2 Esdras 11–12 or that he used traditional images in exactly the same way." See also Collins, *Crisis*, 60.
- 101 So Caird, *Revelation*, 218–219; Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, 704–708; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 256–257; Sweet, *Revelation*, 257; Bauckham, *Climax*, 406–407; M. Kiddle and M.K. Ross, *The Revelation of St. John* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), 350–351; Lohse, *Offenbarung*, 95–97; Farrer, *Rebirth*, 245–260; Mounce, *Revelation*, 316–317; Blount, *Revelation*, 320; Primasius, *Apoc.* 17.9; Bede, *Apoc.* 17.10.
- 102 The number four, which stands for 'completeness' or 'universality,' is used twenty-nine times (Rev 4:4 [2x], 6, 8, 10; 5:6, 8 [2x], 14; 6:1, 6; 7:1 [3x], 2, 4, 11; 9:13, 14, 15; 11:16; 14:1, 3 [2x]; 15:7; 19:4 [2x]; 20:8; 21:17), not counting the rhetorical usages (e.g., "Every tribe, language, people, and nation . . ." in Rev 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15, etc.). Other numbers include: 144,000 (7:4; 14:1, 3); 12,000 (7:5–8; 21:16); 42 months (11:2; 13:5); 1,260 days (11:3; 12:6); twelve (12:1; 21:12 [2x], 14 [2x]; 21:21 [2x]; 22:2); ten (2:10; 12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 7, 12, 16); 666 (13:18); 1,600 (14:20); three (16:13, 19; 21:13 [4x]); 7,000 (11:13); 24 (4:4, 10; 5:8; 11:16; 19:4); 1,000 (20:2, 3, 4, 6, 7); 144 (21:17).
- 103 Rev 1:4 [2x], 11, 12, 16, 20 [6x]; 2:1 [2x]; 3:1 [2x]; 4:5 [2x]; 5:1, 5, 6 [3x]; 6:1; 8:2 [2x]; 8:6 [2x]; 10:3, 4 [2x]; 11:3; 12:3 [2x]; 13:1; 15:1 [2x], 6 [2x], 7 [2x], 8 [2x]; 16:1 [2x]; 17:1 [2x], 3, 7, 9 [2x],

the number seven was often associated with ‘completeness’ or ‘totality’ (e.g., the complete cosmos was created in its totality in seven days in Genesis 1).¹⁰⁴ Revelation adopts this Jewish interpretation for the number seven throughout the entire book: the slain lamb of Revelation 5:6 has “seven horns and seven eyes” (complete power and total knowledge), the earthquake of Revelation 11:13 kills “seven thousand people” (the complete number of deaths), and even the three sets of seven judgments (seals, trumpets, bowls) indicate the complete and total judgment of God.¹⁰⁵ Consistently in Revelation, the number seven symbolizes ‘completeness’ or ‘totality.’ It would be anomalous, then, to surmise that the number seven in Revelation 17 follows a different interpretative methodology (‘counting’) than the number seven in the rest of Apocalypse (‘symbolism’).¹⁰⁶

Moreover, John was not obligated by history to select the number seven for the kings of Revelation 17, but rather, the number seven alludes to Daniel’s apocalyptic vision. In Daniel 7, four beasts emerge from the sea (7:2–3): the lion-like beast (7:4), the bear-like beast (7:5), the leopard-like beast with four heads (7:6), and the fourth beast adorned with ten horns (7:7). These four beasts, interpreted by the attendant angel as four kingdoms (7:17), instruct the beast imagery in Revelation 13:1–2a—the beast comes out of the sea (Dan 7:2–3) with ten horns (Dan 7:7) and resembles a leopard, a bear, and a lion (Dan 7:2–6). Significantly, the seven heads of the beast in Revelation 13:1b—which are the seven kings in Revelation 17:9–10a—also parallel Daniel 7 and the four beasts who have a total of seven heads (i.e., one head for the first, second, and fourth

10, 11; 21:9 [3x]. This does not count rhetorical uses of the number seven, including: Seven Churches (Rev 2–3), Seven Seals (Rev 6:1–17; 8:1), Seven Trumpets (Rev 8:2–9:21; 11:15–19), Seven Thunders (Rev 10:1–4), Seven Bowls (Rev 15:1–16:21), Seven Beatitudes (Rev 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14), etc.

104 See Gen 4:15, 24; 7:2, 3; Exod 25:37; 37:23; Lev 4:6, 17; 8:11; Num 8:2; 28:27; Deut 15:1; 28:7, 25; Josh 6:4, 6, 8, 13, 15; Ps 12:6; 79:12; 119:164; Prov 9:1; 24:16; 26:25; Isa 4:1; 11:15; 30:26; Ezek 40:22, 26; 41:3; Dan 3:19; Micah 5:5; Zech 3:9; 4:2, 10. See also Friesen, *Imperial*, 136.

105 All three sets of seven judgments brings the world to its complete destruction—seals (Rev 6:12–17), trumpets (Rev 11:15–18, esp. v. 18), and bowls (Rev 16:17–21).

106 Mounce, *Revelation*, 21 adds, “Since the seven heads are also seven hills (17:9) and the eighth is one of the seven (17:11), it is probably unwise to base a literal computation on what appears to be a highly symbolic figure.” It is often objected that the number seven has a historical referent due to the fact that there were seven churches in Asia Minor addressed in Revelation 2–3. Caird, *Revelation*, 218 retorts, “No one supposes that he wrote to seven churches because there were only seven in the province of Asia, nor even because there were only seven in his diocese, a diocese so erratic as to contain Ephesus but not Magnesia or Tralles, Laodicea but not Colossae or Hierapolis.”

beasts and four heads for the third beast). John did not therefore choose the number seven to parody the amount of rulers in the empire; the number seven was chosen for him by one of his sources, Daniel 7.¹⁰⁷

Given the significant flaws and methodological peculiarities in each emperor option, Revelation 17:9–11 fails to offer conclusive evidence for an early-date of Revelation's composition. Thus, the early Christian witness to a Domitianic date remains unassailed.

Conclusion

The early Christian witness to the date of Revelation decisively points to the end of Domitian's reign (92–96 CE). If conclusive internal evidence dictates a different date of composition, then the early Christian witness should be disregarded. However, the internal evidence offered by early-date advocates (i.e., Rev 11:1–2; Rev 13:18; and Rev 17:9–11) proves insufficient. In the absence of any internal evidence to the contrary, the tentative conclusion of a Domitianic date is pursued further. The next chapter considers the late-date in its socio-historical context specifically addressing the alleged persecution of Christians under Domitian.¹⁰⁸

107 Sweet, *Revelation*, 21 adds, "... it was not the author's concern to say which emperor was reigning—he was not writing for posterity but for his contemporaries, and they did not need to be told." See also Friesen, *Imperial*, 141; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 20, 185; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 38.

108 Traditional internal evidence for a late-date includes: Nero myth (see discussion above), the parallel between Revelation 1:16 and the coin of Domitian's son holding seven stars (*RIC* 209A, 213) minted in 82–84 CE [E.P. Janzen, "The Jesus of the Apocalypse Wears the Emperor's Clothes," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1994 Seminar Papers* (ed. E.H. Lovering, Jr.; Atlanta: Scholars, 1994), 653; Kraybill, *Imperial*, 64], the use of Babylon for Rome [Friesen, *Imperial*, 138–140; Kraybill, *Imperial*, 33; Kraybill, *Apocalypse*, 29–30; Thompson, *Revelation*, 14; Collins, *Crisis*, 57–58; Witulski, *Johannesoffenbarung*, 21; Beale, *Revelation*, 18–19]; "our lord and our God" in Rev 4:11 paralleling Suet., *Dom.* 13 [Beale, *Revelation*, 334–335; Aune, *Revelation*, 1:310–312], the founding of the church in Smyrna (Rev 2:8–11) and Pol. *Phil* 11.3 [Collins, *Crisis*, 75; Beale, *Revelation*, 16–17; cf. Zahn, *Offenbarung*, 1:34; Mounce, *Revelation*, 19]. Adding to these common indices, the next chapter addresses the socio-historical problem of Domitianic persecution and concludes that Revelation's nuanced portrayal of persecution attests precisely to the late date.

The Date of the Book of Revelation pt. 2: The Socio-Historical Context of the Flavian Dynasty

The inquiry into the date of Revelation is not complete without an analysis of Christian persecution in Domitian's reign.¹ As seen below, early-date advocates argue that the text of Revelation reflects a time of intense persecution by the empire; Neronian persecution is widely documented while Domitianic persecution eludes the historical annals. Thus, this chapter focuses on the socio-historical context of the Flavian Dynasty to consider the possibility of persecution under Domitian and, by extension, a Domitianic date for Revelation. This examination, then, both completes the investigation of Revelation's date of composition and presents potential 'points of conversation' for the subject narrative.

The Problem: The Alleged Domitianic Persecution

The oft quoted remark by John A.T. Robinson positions the early-date objection, "One thing of which we may be certain is that the Apocalypse, unless the product of a perfervid and psychotic imagination, was written out of an intense experience of the Christian suffering at the hands of the imperial authorities, represented by the 'beast' of Babylon."² With this in place, early-date advocates argue that there is little or no evidence from Roman sources for the persecution of Christians under Domitian.³ Normally, this is followed by an examination of the Christian persecution under Nero in 64 CE⁴ which allegedly aligns with the socio-historical context demanded by Revelation:

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- 1 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 8; Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 407.
 - 2 John A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 230–231.
 - 3 Robinson, *Redating*, 231–233; Mark Wilson, "The Early Christians in Ephesus and the Date of Revelation, Again," *Neot* 39:1 (2005): 165.
 - 4 Tac., *Ann.* 15.44.

mass killings.⁵ According to this argumentation, the late-date advocates have a two-fold problem: [1] the text of Revelation demands mass persecutions of Christians by the Roman Empire and [2] there is no evidence of Domitianic persecution of Christians.

Traditional Late-Date Reconstruction of Domitianic Persecution

Traditionally, late-date advocates have attempted to depict Domitian as a tyrannical leader who includes Christians in his terror.⁶ Although the last half of that statement may be difficult to prove, Domitian as a 'tyrant' ruler, primarily at the end of his reign, does have precedent amongst Roman historians.⁷ Suetonius suggests that Vespasian was aware of Domitian's evil "disposition, and throughout [Vespasian's] own reign endeavored to keep [Domitian] as much as possible apart from public affairs."⁸ As the text continues, Titus adopts the same policy toward Domitian, "which so inflamed Domitian's hatred that he is believed several times to have attempted his brother's life, and in [Titus'] last illness to have taken means to make his recovery impossible."⁹ Dio Cassius adds Titus' death-bed lamentation ("I have made but one mistake") and interprets the singular error as surrendering "the empire of the Romans to a man like Domitian, whose character will be made clear in the continuation of [Dio Cassius'] narrative."¹⁰

5 Robinson, *Redating*, 248–253; Wilson, "Early Christians," 163–193; Duane Warden, "Imperial Persecution and the Dating of 1 Peter and Revelation," *JETS* 34.2 (1991): 208.

6 Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 327–329; T.F. Glasson, *The Revelation of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 6–9; G.E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 8; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 17–19. For more, see the list in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Apocalyptic and Gnosis in the Book of Revelation and Paul," *JBL* 92 (1973): 565 (n. 3).

7 Stéphane Gsell, *Essai sur le regne de l'empereur Domitien* (Paris: Thorin & fils, 1894); Pat Southern, *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1997); Ronald Syme, "Domitian: the Last Years," *Chiron* 13 (1983): 121–128; Martin Goodman, *The Roman World 44 BC–AD 180* (London: Routledge, 1997), 64–65; Edward T. Salmon, *A History of the Roman World from 30 BC to AD 138* (London: Methuen, 1970), 226. See also Richard Heath, "Lyons and Its Martyrs," *Golden Hours: An Illustrated Monthly Magazine for Family and General Reading* 12 (Mar 1879): 179; [Unknown Author], "Roman History," *Reynold's Miscellany of Romance, General Literature, Science, and Art*, 18.447 (Jan 1857): 5; The Bishop of London, "The Age of St. Paul, in Connexion with that of St. John," *Good Words* 9 (July 1868): 447–456.

8 Suet., *Dom.* 2 (Rolfe, LCL).

9 Ibid.

10 Dio Cass. 67.26.3–4 (Cary, LCL).

Late-date advocates argue that even though Domitian masks his evil for quite some time,¹¹ a turning point occurs in 89 CE when Domitian was forced to suppress the conspiracy of the highly trusted Antonius Saturninus.¹² Suetonius writes, "After his victory in the civil war he became even more cruel, and to discover any conspirators who were in hiding, tortured many of the opposite party by a new form of inquisition, inserting fire in their privates; and he cut off the hands of some of them."¹³ This event precipitated the final years of Domitian's reign characterized as cruel and terrifying,¹⁴ in that family,¹⁵ philosophers,¹⁶ playwrights,¹⁷ and even Roman officials¹⁸ were in danger of his tyranny. Dio Cassius recounts:

It would be impossible to discover the total number of those who were executed by Domitian. Indeed, he condemned himself so severely for this course that, in order to prevent any remembrance of those who were put to death from surviving, he prohibited the entering of their names in the records. Furthermore, he did not even send any communication to the

11 Suet., *Dom.* 2; *Dom.* 10; Dio Cass. 67.1.

12 Suet., *Dom.* 6; *Dom.* 7. See Syme, "Domitian," 121–127; Southern, *Domitian*, 35ff., 101ff.

13 Suet., *Dom.* 10.5 (Rolfe, LCL).

14 Tac., *Agr.* 44 celebrates the early death of Agricola in that, "he was spared those later years during which Domitian, leaving now no interval or breathing space of time, but, as it were, with one continuous blow, drained the life-blood of the State" (Church and Brodribb). Also, [Unknown Author], "An Inscription Dug out of the Ruins of a Palace at Rome," *Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, 50.367 (1772: Mar): 117, transmits an inscription found in Rome, "Under this monument repose the ashes of Domitian, the last of the Caesars, and the fourth scourge of Rome; a tyrant no less deliberate than Tiberius, no less capricious than Caligula, and no less outrageous than Nero:—When satiated with issuing edicts to spill human blood, he found an amusement in stabbing flies with a bodkin:—His reign, though undisturbed by war, occasioned no less calamity to his country than would have happened from the loss of twenty battles:—He was magnificent from vanity, affable from artifice, and implacable from cowardice:—He flattered incessantly the soldiery who governed him, and detested the Senate, who caressed him:—While living, he was deified, and the assassins alone, whom his Empress had sent to dispatch him, could convince him of his mortality:—This monster governed during fifteen years, yet the administration of Titus, the delight of human kind, was confined to two!—Ye passengers! Who read this inscription, blaspheme not the gods!"

15 Suet., *Dom.* 10.4.

16 Ibid., 10.3. See also Southern, *Domitian*, 114–115; R. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order* (rev. ed.; London: Routledge, 1992), 53.

17 Suet., *Dom.* 10.4.

18 Dio Cass. 67.13–14. See also Ronald Syme, "Antonius Saturninus," *JRS* 68 (1978): 12–21.

senate regarding those who had been put out of the way, though he sent their heads . . . and caused them to be exposed in the Forum.¹⁹

Late-date advocates then suggest that a cruelty “suspicious of all mankind”²⁰ could easily include mass persecutions of Christians, with the deaths of Clemens and Domitilla as marquee ‘Christian’ examples.²¹ Indeed, this exact picture is found in the description of Domitian in Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.17:

When Domitian had given many proofs of his great cruelty and had put to death without any reasonable trial no small number of men distinguished at Rome by family and career, and had punished without a cause myriads of other notable men by banishment and confiscation of their property, he finally showed himself the successor of Nero’s campaign of hostility to God. He was the second to promote persecution against us, though his father, Vespasian, had planned no evil against us.²²

Therefore, so the argument goes, the Domitianic time period did include mass persecutions of Christians by the Roman Empire.

Modern Response to Domitianic Persecution

Nevertheless, to prove that Domitian was a tyrannical ruler, particularly at the end of his reign, does not prove that he engaged in mass persecution of Christians. Indeed, the lack of corroboration by Roman sources for the assertions of Domitianic persecution by Christian sources is quite troublesome and should not be easily discounted.²³ Recently, Leonard Thompson exposed these

19 Dio Cass. 67.11.3 (Cary, LCL).

20 Dio Cass. 67.14.4 (Cary, LCL). See also J.W.C. Wand, *A History of the Early Church to AD 590* (London: Methuen, 1963), 31.

21 Dio Cass. 67.14.1–3; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.18.5. See J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), 131; Kümmel, *Introduction*, 466–469.

22 *Hist. eccl.* 3.17 (Lake, LCL). Domitian is also referred to as Nero in Juvenal, *Sat.* 4 (Ramsay, LCL), “What time the last of the Flavii was flaying the half-dying world, and Rome was enslaved to a bald-headed Nero . . .” Nevertheless, some modern historians suggest that his “above average” administration ability [so Richard M. Haywood, *Ancient Rome* (New York: McKay, 1967), 450, 452] and other factors demonstrate that he was not a second Nero at all. See H.W. Pleket, “Domitian, the Senate, and the Provinces,” *Mnemosyne* 14 (1961): 297–315.

23 Examples of these Christian sources usually include: Eusebius, 1 Clement, and Revelation, although some include 1 Peter and Hebrews as well.

weaknesses through historical skepticism and developed an entirely different picture of Domitian's interaction with Christians.

Thompson depicts Domitian as a relatively good emperor who suffers from Roman writers that "distort virtually every area of Domitian's public and state activity during the time of his emperorship."²⁴ For example, regarding the punishment of Flavius Clemens and Domitilla—referenced by late-date advocates of Christian persecution—Thompson writes:

Dio says that Domitian charged Flavius Clemens and his wife Domitilla with atheism, 'a charge on which many others who drifted into Jewish ways were condemned' (67.14.2). Dio is apparently contrasting Domitian here to Nerva (68.1.2). It is difficult to assess the standard sources in light of their obvious bias against Domitian and their attempt to portray him as evil and unjust.²⁵

According to Thompson, these biases of the Roman elite developed out of frustration toward Domitian's economic and political policies, his actions toward relatives and/or friends (i.e., exile), as well as his hindrance to career advancement.²⁶

In response, writers such as Pliny the Younger, Tacitus, and Suetonius emphasized Domitian's negative qualities and neglected his positive actions, changing posterity's perception of his reign (i.e., Dio Cassius).²⁷ Trajan harnessed this bitterness to promulgate his own 'new era' through the intentional slander of Domitian.²⁸ Consequently, these writers do not preserve history but Roman propaganda that intentionally distorts the actual reign of Domitian. Therefore, according to Thompson, these sources cannot be trusted to construct a history of Christian persecution at the end of the first century.

24 Leonard Thompson, "A Sociological Analysis of Tribulation in the Apocalypse of John," *Semeia* 36 (1986): 155; idem, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 101. See also Rowland, *Heaven*, 407; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis & Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 69–73.

25 Thompson, "Sociological," 161.

26 Thompson, *Revelation*, 95–115.

27 Thompson, "Sociological," 155; Thompson, *Revelation*, 96. For the positive perspective of Domitian's administrative abilities, see David Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the End of the Third Century after Christ* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1950), 1.566–92; B.W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London: Routledge, 1992), 114. For a similar treatment of Tacitus, see Candida R. Moss, *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 139.

28 Thompson, *Revelation*, 115.

Instead of these 'biased' authors (i.e., Pliny, Suetonius, Tacitus, and Dio Cassius), Thompson prefers the writings of Quintilian, Statius,²⁹ and Martial, all writing under the reign of Domitian.³⁰ Primarily focusing on the use of "Lord and God" in reference to Domitian, Thompson suggests that the writers during Domitian's time present an emperor who deflects heightened adulation,³¹ contrasting the megalomaniac presented in the 'biased' writings.³² After his analysis of the 'unbiased' writings, Thompson concludes that no mass persecution of Christians occurred under Domitian and, more than likely, just the opposite reality.³³

A couple of points of critique, however, significantly weaken the likelihood of Thompson's reconstruction. First, the promulgation of Trajan's 'new era' over and against the Flavian dynasty through anti-Domitian rhetoric does not coalesce with the complete picture in the 'biased' writings. While there is a consistent disdain toward Domitian, the 'biased' writings herald the Flavian dynasty as the redeemer of Rome.

During the year of the four emperors (69 CE), the future of the Roman Empire was in flux as civil war raged even in the city of Rome itself.³⁴ The emergence of Vespasian and the establishment of the Flavian Dynasty, then, was a welcomed interruption to the empire's uncertainty. Indeed, under Trajan, Suetonius writes, "The empire, which for a long time had been unsettled and, as it were, drifting, through the usurpation and violent death of three emperors, was at last taken in hand and given stability by the Flavian family" (*Vesp.* 1.1,

29 For adulation of Domitian by Statius, see Franz Sauter, *Der römische Kaiserkult bei Martial und Statius* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1934).

30 See Thompson, "Sociological," 156–158. Thompson's overall point is not to argue against the late date of Revelation; he argues for the theme of persecution to "be explored in the context of the seer's linguistic universe rather than in the time and space of first-century Asia" (p. 148).

31 Thompson, "Sociological," 157 points to Statius, *Silv.* 1.6.81–84 as evidence of Domitian's refusal of the title 'Lord' [*contra* Kenneth Scott, *The Imperial Cult Under the Flavians* (New York: Arno Press, 1975), 109]. Thompson uses this passage to even explain away references in Martial to Domitian as 'Lord' and 'God' (Martial, *Epigrams* 5.3; 5.5; 7.2; 7.5; 7.34; 8.2; 8.82; 9.28; 9.66; see also 10.72). After he acknowledges Martial's usage, he states (without further explanation), "Statius's comment on Domitian's reticence to being called dominus is probably an accurate reflection of Domitian's view throughout his reign" (p. 158, n. 24).

32 Suet., *Dom.* 13.2; Pliny, *Pan.* 33.4; 52.6; Dio Cass. 67.4.7; 67.13.4. See also Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 8.4.

33 Thompson, "Sociological," 153–154; Thompson, *Revelation*, 95.

34 Tacitus's *Histories* details these events leading up to the accession of the Flavian Dynasty.

[Rolfe, LCL]). As Suetonius continues, this favorable description of the Flavian dynasty strikingly contrasts his hostile depiction of Domitian: “This house was, it is true, obscure and without family portraits, yet it was one of which our country had no reason whatever to be ashamed, even though it is the general opinion that the penalty which Domitian paid for his avarice and cruelty was fully merited.” Therefore, in writings under Trajan, while Domitian is scandalized, the Flavian dynasty is celebrated; while Domitian is harshly discredited, the Flavian dynasty is honored.³⁵

This distinction is also visible following the Senate’s decision to pass *damnatio memoriae* on Domitian’s legacy.³⁶ Instead of eradicating the Imperial Cult temple featuring Domitian in Ephesus, the temple was rededicated to Vespasian.³⁷ Once again, the derision of Domitian is separated from the honor and admiration of the Flavian dynasty. This dissonance indicates that the picture of Domitian in the ‘biased’ writers may not be as biased as Thompson suggests.

The emergence of Trajan’s ‘new era,’ therefore, did not necessitate complete contempt for the entire Flavian dynasty. Instead, Domitian emerges as a great aberration in a favorably remembered family. To completely disregard, then, the negative picture of Domitian by the ‘biased’ writers is a highly questionable historical methodology.

Second, the ‘bias’ for Pliny, Suetonius, and Tacitus (inherited by Dio Cassius) as a result of Trajan’s favor³⁸ can equally be leveled against the ‘unbiased’ writings of Quintilian, Statius, and Martial. All three of these writers prospered under Domitian,³⁹ with Quintilian even serving as the tutor of Domitian’s

35 While Thompson, *Revelation*, 100 acknowledges this distinction, he still awkwardly asserts that Trajan used the anti-Domitian rhetoric because “... adjustments had to be made in order to fabricate a break with the Flavian period” (p. 115).

36 Suet., *Dom.* 23.1. See also John D. Grainger, *Nerva and the Roman Succession Crisis of AD 96–99* (London: Routledge, 2003), 49.

37 See Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 60; S.R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (9th ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 178; Magie, *Roman*, 572. For discussion on the name of this temple, see Steven J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia, and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 29–49.

38 Thompson, *Revelation*, 96–97, 109–115.

39 Thompson acknowledges this point, at least in a cursory manner (Thompson, *Revelation*, 103, 106–107), and ironically, Thompson, *Revelation*, 222 (n. 4) admits that Martial (an ‘unbiased’ writer) was supported by Pliny (a ‘biased’ writer). For further discussion and

great-nephews.⁴⁰ Furthermore, if Domitian was tyrannical in the least bit, it would serve the contemporary writers well to paint the emperor in a favorable manner in order to avoid punishment. Indeed, depicting a reigning, cruel tyrant in a favorable light is far more likely than a retrospective conversion of someone into a tyrant that never was one.

Third, Thompson does not entertain the possibility that the benevolent picture painted by Quintilian, Statius, and Martial was the result of 'hidden transcripts.' More fully developed below, hidden transcripts were implemented broadly in Domitian's reign.⁴¹ In fact, Quintilian teaches in his schools of rhetoric the art of linguistic deception in which "the speaker pretends to say something other than that which he actually does say."⁴² Quintilian even specifies that linguistic deception should be implemented "if it is unsafe to speak openly."⁴³ Thus, one of Thompson's 'unbiased' writers admits to and even advises others to use hidden transcripts during the reign of a tyrant.

Therefore, Thompson's presentation of Domitian as merely the victim of effective negative propaganda is highly unlikely. The depiction of Domitian as a cruel tyrant, primarily at the end of his reign, in Suetonius, Tacitus, Pliny, and Dio Cassius should not be discounted as Thompson attempts. Yet neither does this conclusion justify the assertion that Domitian directed mass persecutions of Christians.⁴⁴

critique see Thomas B. Slater, "On the Social Setting of the Revelation to John," *NTS* 44 (1998): 232–256 (esp. 236–237).

40 Quintilian, *Inst.* preface 2.

41 Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.2.65; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 3.13. For further discussion, see Steve Mason, "Figured Speech and Irony in T. Flavius Josephus," in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (ed. Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James Rives; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005): 252; Frederick Ahl, "The Art of Safe Criticism in Greece and Rome," *AJP* 105 (1984): 192.

42 Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.1.14 (Butler, LCL). See also Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.2.65.

43 Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.2.66 (Butler, LCL). Discussing Tacitus, Tessa Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His Society* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 198 concludes, "... the tone of [*Hist.* 2.101] is in keeping with this pessimistic author's general conviction that, since the late Augustan age, all imperial history was distorted by fear if written during the lifetime of its subjects, and by resentment if after their deaths. ... Moreover, what Tacitus actually asserts is that criticism of a member of the Flavian faction had been impossible: in other words, historians had not been free to say all they wished. ... Our overall impression is that before Tacitus came to the subject, very little had been written at Rome about the reign of any Flavian. It was too difficult, too dangerous, or perhaps simply unfashionable."

44 Those who deny Domitianic 'mass persecution' include: Leon Hardy Cranfield, *The Early Persecutions of the Christians* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1913); Adela Yarbro

Three Key Problems: A Path to a New Way Forward

At this point, early-date advocates of Revelation may conclude: since Roman sources do not attest to mass persecution of Christians under Domitian (necessitated by the text of Revelation), then the Apocalypse must be dated to the time of Nero. This conclusion, however, suffers from three key problems: [1] What definition of ‘persecution’ should govern the historical inquiry into the time of Domitian? Both early- and late-date proponents assume that persecution equals ‘mass killings’ of Christians. But is persecution that one-dimensional? [2] Does the text of Revelation actually reflect a time period of Christian ‘mass killings’? Again, both early- and late-date proponents assume that the Apocalypse portrays a time period of ‘mass killings’ of Christians. But are *present* ‘mass killings’ actually found in Revelation? [3] How does the picture of Domitian explain the increase in Christian ‘killings’ throughout the second and third centuries? The increase in Christian martyrdom and imperial derision during this time period does not develop spontaneously. But if there is no persecution of Christians under Domitian in any form, then how does such an atmosphere emerge in the early second century? Answers to these three queries dispel persistent assumptions and offer a new path of historical inquiry into Domitianic persecution of Christians.

A Definition of Persecution

Often when Domitianic persecution is discussed whole arguments and broad conclusions never mention a definition of ‘persecution.’ Scholars confidently pronounce that “no convincing evidence exists for a Domitianic persecution of the Christians.”⁴⁵ Yet, they offer no definition for the persecution so easily dismissed.

Surveying the various authors, however, reveals that the persecution sought after in the historical documents is ‘mass killings’ of Christians in the form of some law, edict, or direct act of the emperor.⁴⁶ This assumed definition

Collins, “Dating the Apocalypse of John,” *BR* 26 (1981): 34; idem, *Crisis*, 54–110; Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 10–12.

45 Jones, *Domitian*, 117. See also F.W. Beare, “Persecution,” *IDB* (1962): 2.737; J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John’s Apocalypse* (JSNTSup 132; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1999), 34; Thompson, *Revelation*, 16; Collins, *Crisis*, 104; Candida R. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies, and Traditions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 8–12.

46 So Paul Keresztes, “The Jews, The Christians, and Emperor Domitian,” *VC* 27.1 (1973): 1–28; Warden, “Imperial Persecution,” 203–212; Johannes Knudsen, *The Lady of the Emperor*

of persecution, though, overlooks two key aspects. First, the acuity or intensity of a persecution is quite relative to the group persecuted.⁴⁷ This is not to suggest that the persecution is 'imagined' or merely a 'perceived crisis' by the subject group⁴⁸ but that actual persecution may exist for the subject group that is imperceptible to others (posterity included). The size of the community and the amount of deaths experienced in the community *does* effect whether or not the persecution is considered 'intense' or even 'widespread' by that community.

For example, in a community of five hundred people, only one death can be catastrophic for the group, whereas in a city of fifty-thousand people one death may not even be noticed by a majority. Therefore, it is quite presumptuous to assume that only a few killings of Christians did not constitute an intense persecution from the perspective of this group,⁴⁹ given that the community of Christians across the empire would not have been a high percentage of the Roman population.⁵⁰

Second, persecution as mere 'killing' simply ignores the subject perspective. This reduction regulates what evidence constitutes as 'suffering' without allowing the voice of the victims to dictate the inquiry. As James C. Scott articulates, "We know relatively little about a Malay villager if we know only that he is poor and landless. . . . To know the cultural meaning of his poverty . . . is to learn the shape of his indignity and, hence, to gauge the content of his anger."⁵¹ To adapt Scott's point to the present discussion, it would be foolish to assume that Malay villagers do not 'suffer' or experience persecution simply because they are not being killed by the social elite. The complexities of persecution stretch far beyond whether someone is alive or dead; some circumstances suggest that while the people are living they are treated as if they are not. Similarly, to reduce the persecution of Christians down to 'mass killings' is to overlook the multilayered nature of persecution, as well as the complexities of

(Des Moines, Iowa: Church History, 1945), 30; Thompson, *Revelation*, 198; Collins, *Crisis*, 112–114; Rowland, *Heaven*, 408; Moss, *Ancient*, 9; Moss, *Myth*, 16, 129.

47 See Collins, "Dating," 38; Collins, *Crisis*, 84.

48 Collins, *Crisis*, 106, 141, 165. See also Rowland, *Heaven*, 9–11; Thompson, *Revelation*, 27–28, 193–194; Moss, *Ancient*, 13. See introduction pp. 10–16 above.

49 Harold M. Parker, Jr., "Domitian and the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Iliff Review* 36.2 (1979): 33; Friesen, *Imperial*, 145; Moss, *Myth*, 15.

50 For approximations of the Christian community's size across the empire, see Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 1997).

51 James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 113.

suffering.⁵² What is needed is a more balanced articulation of the definition of persecution.

Persecution can be physical, non-physical, or both. Physical persecution includes, but is not limited to: banishments/exiles,⁵³ beatings,⁵⁴ and even executions.⁵⁵ While most historical inquiries do not move beyond this category, non-physical persecution is just as invasive in the life of the victim. Non-physical persecution includes, but is not limited to: slander,⁵⁶ deception,⁵⁷

52 Persistently, authors discount the subject's perspective in the definition of persecution. So Moss, *Ancient*, 50, in her attempt to virtually eradicate any evidence of Christian persecution in the first three centuries CE, asserts, "Just as certain physical ailments seem mild by contrast to life-threatening illness, so too social marginalization becomes inconsequential when measured against genocide." Elsewhere, Moss, *Myth*, 15, 153 discounts "prejudice against Christians" and even portrays Decius as the victim of unfair, negative Christian propaganda: "Christian writers describe Decius as wicked and his decree as one of the machinations of the devil. It's easy to see why they thought this. In principle the decree required that Christians apostatize or die. Just because the Christians saw the decree as a manifestation of the work of Satan in the world, however, doesn't mean that Christians were being persecuted. In fact, Decius may not even have had the Christians in mind when he passed the legislation" (Moss, *Myth*, 148, see also 150–151, 164). This complete disregard of the subject's point of view allows Moss to irresponsibly conclude: "When Christians were marginalized, denied legal rights, ostracized from society, or otherwise threatened . . . this is not persecution" (*Myth*, 159). While completely ignored by Moss in her projects, 'Postcolonial Criticism' and 'Examinations of Dominance' (in chapter 1 above) issue a strong critique of her definition of persecution and her dismissal of the subject perspective. As Fiorenza, *Justice*, 9 insightfully observes, "the answer to the [question of persecution] will also depend on whose perspective we adopt. One could argue from the perspective of well-to-do white Americans that no harassment, denigration, discrimination, or oppression of blacks existed at the time of Martin Luther King, Jr., although King was assassinated. The perspective and experience of blacks would be quite different. Similarly, the author of Rev. has adopted the 'perspective from below' and expressed the experiences of those who were powerless, poor, and in constant fear of denunciation." See also Greg Carey, "Review: *The Myth of Persecution* by Candida R. Moss," *Christian Century* (Apr 2013): 39.

53 Rev 1:9; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.18.1; 3.18.5.

54 Acts 16:16–24.

55 Dio Cass. 67.14.1–3.

56 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.26.9. The effects of slander are easily demonstrated with examples like: the hate speech toward the Jewish people during Hitler's reign, language utilized to denigrate African Americans during Ante-bellum slavery, and others.

57 2 Thess 2:1–3a. Cf. 2 Thess 3:17.

ostracism,⁵⁸ economic (re)distribution,⁵⁹ symbolic/oppressive taxes,⁶⁰ proselyte restriction,⁶¹ and fear/pressure to compromise.⁶²

All of these elements of persecution must be taken into account when investigating Domitian's persecution of Christians. To limit the definition of Christian persecution to 'mass killings' is simply to ignore the multifaceted nature of persecution and suffering that includes both physical and non-physical forms. Such negligence not only suppresses the perspective of the victim, but also leads to poor historical conclusions based on inadequate sociological assumptions.

Picture of Persecution in Revelation

As mentioned above, the traditional picture of Revelation is a text that reflects present persecution of Christians, defined as 'mass killings.' Early-date advocates, like Mark Wilson, use this picture to place Revelation in Nero's reign:

The internal evidence in Revelation suggests localized persecution in Asia while in other parts of the empire, particularly Rome, massive

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- 58 Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) and others aptly point out that in a society whose cultural currency is based on honor and shame, ostracism from the community is comparable to death itself—for one's identity and existence is inextricably linked to the society. See Tac., *Ann.* 15.44 and Slater, "Social," 246.
- 59 Dio Cass. 67.14.1–3.
- 60 Regarding the Jewish rebellion in 6 CE by Judas of Galilee, Josephus, *Ant.* 18.4 recalls the zealous interpretation that "this taxation was no better than an introduction to slavery." See also the discussion on the *fiscus Judaicus* below.
- 61 For discussion on Jewish and Christian proselytizing, see Martin Goodman, "Jewish Proselytizing in the First Century," in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (eds. Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak; London: Routledge, 1992), 68–72, 75; Tessa Rajak, "The Jewish Community and Its Boundaries," in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (eds. Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak; London: Routledge, 1992), 19–20; Margaret H. Williams, "Domitian, the Jews and the 'Judaizers': A Simple Matter of Cupiditas and Maiestas?," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 39.2 (1990): 209; Savas Agourides, "The Character of the Early Persecutions of the Church," in *Orthodox Theology and Diakonia—Trends and Prospects* (ed. Demetrios J. Constantelos; Brookline, MA: Hellenic College, 1981), 118; Dio Cass. 65.18.5; Tac., *Hist.* 5.5.
- 62 Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96. Price, *Ritual* 198; G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?," *PP* 26 (1963): 6–38. For an enlightening discussion on the terrorizing effect a physical killing can have on a subject community (shattering boundaries of security and stability), see Anatheia E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 143–147.

persecution had produced innumerable martyrs. This picture of widespread tribulation is compatible with an early date during or after the reign of Nero, but incompatible with the historical evidence for a late date during Domitian's reign.⁶³

With no stated definition of persecution, Wilson's conclusion of "massive persecution" that had "produced innumerable martyrs" is allegedly based on "internal evidence in Revelation." But is this the picture that Revelation reflects? Does the text of the Apocalypse depict a contemporary 'mass killing of Christians'?

To be sure, Revelation is a book of conflict,⁶⁴ but *who* is in conflict, the *type* of conflict (physical and/or non-physical), and *when* the conflict occurs varies broadly throughout.⁶⁵ Physical persecution emerges in the Apocalypse in a wide array of images and forms. For example, allusions to Jesus' sacrificial death occur throughout (5:6, 9, 12; 11:8; 12:11; 19:13; etc.) and passages like Revelation 12:11b and 13:10 call Christians to imitate Jesus' patient endurance in suffering. These passages, and others like it, create a vague trajectory of physical persecution that may include death but does not necessitate it. In fact, in addition to Christian 'killings' in Revelation,⁶⁶ general physical sufferings,⁶⁷ imprisonments,⁶⁸ and even banishments/exiles⁶⁹ are found as well.

Equally important is determining *when* the various types of physical persecution (especially 'killings') occur: past, present, or future. Revelation seems to locate Christian 'mass killings' in the indefinite past rather than the present.

63 Wilson, "Early Christians," 174.

64 Conflict of some form can be found in: Rev. 1:9; 2:2, 3, 4, 5b, 6, 7b, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17b, 19b, 20–23, 26; 3:3, 9, 12, 16; 5:6, 9, 12; 6:2, 4, 6, 8b, 9, 11, 12–17; 7:2b, 14b; 8:5, 7, 8–9, 10–11, 12; 9:3–11, 15–19; 11:2b, 5, 7, 10b, 13, 18; 12:4, 7, 8–9, 12b, 13, 15–16, 17; 13:6, 7, 10b, 15, 16–17; 14:8, 9b–11, 12, 13a, 19–20; 16:1, 2, 3, 4, 5b, 6a, 6b, 8–9, 10–11, 14b, 19b; 17:6, 14, 16; 18:8b, 20b, 21, 24; 19:2, 15, 17b–18, 19, 20b–21; 20:2–3, 4a, 7–8, 9b, 10, 15; 22:18, 19.

65 God and Satan (12:7–9; 20:1–3, 7–10), Jews and Christians (2:9; 3:9), Christians and Satan (12:16; 20:7–10), Jesus and Christians (2:14–16; 2:20–23), etc.

66 General 'killings': Rev 6:9–11; 17:6a; 18:24; 20:4 (see also Rev 13:15; 14:13). Specific 'killing': Antipas in Rev 2:13. Adela Yarbro Collins, "Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation," *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism* (ed. David Hellholm; Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 742 (n. 71) suggests that Antipas is "tried and executed by the provincial governor."

67 Rev 1:9; 2:10; 7:14.

68 Rev 2:10; 13:10. Cf. Rev 20:7.

69 Rev 1:9. For a discussion on Rev 1:9 as a *Relegatio* banishment, see Collins, "Persecution," 732ff.

So, when the fifth seal is broken (Rev 6:9), the text depicts the “souls of those having been slain because of the word of God and because of the testimony they had retained.” Boldly, this group asks, “Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long until you judge the ones residing on the earth and avenge our blood?” (6:10). The response in 6:11 is that “they were told to continue to abide a little longer,” which indicates they had already been waiting for vengeance for an indeterminate period of time. Indeed, Samuel A.B. Mercer and Leicester C. Lewis conclude that the martyrs under the altar “do not profess or appear to pertain, any or all of them, necessarily to the present or the immediate past, but only to the indefinite past, extending possibly over quite a long period.”⁷⁰

Still further, Revelation 18:20, 24 includes Old Testament prophets as victims of the ‘mass killings.’ In Revelation 18:20, during the dirge over Babylon,⁷¹ a voice cries out, “Rejoice over her heaven and saints and apostles and prophets, because God judged her for her judgment of you.” Revelation 18:24 continues, “And in her was found blood of prophets and saints, and of all the ones having been slain on the earth.”⁷² The inclusion of Old Testament deaths locates the ‘mass killings’ of the faithful in Revelation in the indefinite past rather than the present.

Indeed, Revelation only offers two examples of present physical persecutions, only one of which involves the death of a Christian. Revelation 1:9 records a physical persecution in the form of the banishment/exile of John,⁷³ and Revelation 2:13, to the church at Pergamum, mentions Antipas “who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.”⁷⁴ While the latter is an example of the ‘killing’ of a Christian, this is the only clear example mentioned in the whole

70 Samuel A.B. Mercer and Leicester C. Lewis, “The Alleged Persecution of Christians by Domitian,” *ATHr* 2.1 (1919): 14. See also Kraybill, *Imperial*, 37. Cf. Rev 7:9–14; 20:4–6.

71 See Gene M. Tucker, *Form Criticism of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Augsburg, 1971), 67–68.

72 See also Rev 16:6 (cf. Rev 11:18).

73 Collins, *Crisis*, 55, 102–104; Rowland, *Heaven*, 13, 423; Brian K. Blount, *Revelation* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 41–42; Mounce, *Revelation*, 53–55; Thomas Söding, “Heilig, heilig, heilig: Zur politischen Theologie der Johannes-Apokalypse,” *ZTK* 96.1 (1999): 50. Cf. Thompson, *Revelation*, 172–173; Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John* (BNTC 19; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006), 38–39; Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 42–43; Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 118.

74 For more discussion, see Collins, *Crisis*, 101–102; Mounce, *Revelation*, 80; G.B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John* (BNTC 19; London: A&C Black, 1966; repr., Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 38.

book of Revelation, and it is the ‘killing’ of *one* Christian and not ‘mass killings’ of Christians. Revelation does, however, seem to indicate that physical persecution leading to death will increase in the indeterminate future in its emphasis on the “patient endurance”⁷⁵ necessary for the impending tribulation.⁷⁶ But present Christian ‘mass killings’ are absent from the text.

Non-physical persecution attested in the book of Revelation dominates the contemporary picture of the audience. Throughout the text, Revelation depicts slander,⁷⁷ deception,⁷⁸ and wealth (re)distribution⁷⁹ as non-physical persecutions used against the first century Christians of Asia Minor. These weapons are used to seduce Christians into worshiping the dragon and his beast.⁸⁰ Revelation 14:9–12 accents the intensity of this present assault:

And a third angel followed them saying in a great voice: “If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he will also drink from the wine of God’s fury, the one having been mixed undiluted in the cup of his wrath. And he will be tormented in fire and sulfur before the holy angels and before the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. And the ones worshipping the beast and his image (and anyone who receives the mark of his name) have no rest day or night.” This calls for patient endurance from the saints, the ones obeying God’s commands and Jesus’ faithfulness.⁸¹

Revelation portrays a contemporary setting in which non-physical persecution is experienced in a heightened manner and that has, at times, resulted in physical persecution. The contemporary non-physical persecution develops

75 Rev 1:9; 13:10; 14:12.

76 Rev 2:10; 3:10; 14:13. See also Brian K. Blount, *Can I Get a Witness?: Reading Revelation through African American Culture* (Louisville: John Knox, 2005), 87; Thompson, *Revelation*, 174; John M. Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), 66–67; Fiorenza, *Justice*, 194; Kraybill, *Imperial*, 37; Rowland, *Heaven*, 413; Gerhard Maier, *Die Johannesoffenbarung und die Kirche* (WUNT 25; Tübingen: Mohr, 1981), 619.

77 Rev 2:9 (cf. Rev 3:9). Thompson, “Sociological,” 149.

78 Rev 2:6, 14, 15, 20–23.

79 Rev 3:17–18; 6:5–6; 13:16–17. See also Rev 6:15; 17:4–16; 18:3, 9–10, 11–17a, 17b–20, 23–24 (cf. Rev 21:24–26). For discussion on wealth in Revelation, see Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically* (Louisville: John Knox, 1989), 85–102; Kraybill, *Imperial*, 24–56.

80 Rev 13:4, 8, 12; 16:2; 19:20. Cf. Rev 20:4. For a discussion on social seduction in Revelation, see Robert A. Lowery, *Revelation’s Rhapsody* (Joplin, Mo.: College, 2006), 59–61.

81 See also Rev 13:8; 16:2; 21:8; 22:14–15.

an atmosphere that increases the potential for more physical persecution in the indeterminate future, reflecting the physical persecution from the indeterminate past.⁸² In the face of both types of persecution, then, Revelation issues a clarion call to Christians for “patient endurance” as they worship God alone.⁸³

Second and Third Century Christian Killings and James C. Scott

The final query addresses the escalation of Christian killings in the second and third centuries CE.⁸⁴ As early as 108 CE with the martyrdom of

82 See Collins, “Persecution,” 746.

83 Rev 1:9; 13:10; 14:12. See also 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 16:15; 18:4; 19:10; 22:8–9.

84 Candida Moss’s recent works scrutinize martyrdom traditions in the first few centuries of church history. While she does admit that “some people were cruelly tortured and brutally executed” (*Myth*, 125; see also 88, 105), the overall analysis calls into question the historical validity of virtually every martyrdom account: “The fact of the matter is that there are no stories about the deaths of martyrs that have not been purposely recast by later generations of Christians in order to further their own theological agendas” (*Myth*, 17; see also 124). Five points are made in response. First, Moss envisions the historian’s task as recovery of the events “as they actually happened” (*Myth*, 100; see also 92–93). In search for “precise historical reports of what actually happened” (*Myth*, 93), Moss decides, “The conclusion is inescapable that none of the early Christian martyrdom stories is completely historically accurate. Even if portions of the accounts are possible and even probable, we can’t be sure that they provide us with accurate information about the manner in which the Christians died. . . . we cannot know for certain that the details of these stories are true” (*Myth*, 124). Such criteria renders all historical inquiry impossible. As Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992), 234 accurately states, “. . . history, comprising pure facts about the past, does not exist anywhere. By definition, the past—Vespasian’s campaign against the Jews, the career of Josephus in Galilee, or the aims of John the Baptist—no longer exists. So it is not immediately accessible to us.” This does not render the historical task meaningless, however, but clarifies the interpretive task and appreciates the complexities of historical reconstruction. Second, her criteria of authenticity, detectable but never clearly stated, postures all historical evidence against the martyrdom traditions. Specifically, if a text betrays scriptural allusions (*Ancient*, 63–65, 125–126) of any kind, Moss concludes that doubt is “certainly cast . . . on the text’s status as an eyewitness report” (*Ancient*, 63). Positing that “all of the early Christian martyr stories have been altered” (*Myth*, 124), Moss observes, “What this means with respect to the authenticity of the account is that the narrative is not pristine or unedited” (*Myth*, 117). Startlingly, she pejoratively quips, “Are we venerating saints or scribal errors?” (*Myth*, 117). If scriptural allusions discredit an account’s authenticity, then even Jesus’ crucifixion could be discounted. Even still, as Maureen A. Tilley, “Review: *Ancient Christian Martyrdom* by Candida Moss,” *TS* 74.2 (2013): 486 remarks, “If this were so, [Moss] would need to discount the photographic record and the eyewitness testimony of opponents of the Mexican martyr Padre Miguel Pro, S.J. (d. 1927), whose execution

exhibits many parallels with the passion of Jesus and the martyrdom of Polycarp.” Third, Moss’s conclusions, at times, do not follow the evidence and argumentation provided. For example, in her conclusion for the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Moss states, “The unvarnished truth is that we *don’t know when this story was written*. There’s no single piece of evidence that can help us pin down the date of the text’s composition precisely, but if we have to make an *educated guess*, then we would say that the account was written in the third century, when voluntary martyrdom and relic collection had already emerged as religious practices. What this means is that the earliest martyrdom account, the document that scholars believe began and fed interest in martyrdom, is a *pious fraud*” (*Myth*, 104, *emphasis added*). Although a bit forceful, Radner, “Unmythical,” 54 accurately reflects on this progression, “Speculations become probabilities, which become assertions, which become facts, which prove the early Christians fraudulently invented martyrdoms.” Fourth, as stated above (footnote 52), Moss persistently adopts the perspective of the elite (*Myth*, 163) and ignores (if not vilifies) the subject perspective. As evidence to prove that “Christians were stubborn, petulant, difficult, and, at times, completely incomprehensible” (*Myth*, 179), Moss offers the second-century *Martyrs of Lyons* account in which “a martyr named Sanctus refused to give the judge any information . . . and instead answered all questions by saying, ‘I am a Christian’” (*Myth*, 178). She continues with this critique of Sanctus (and other Christian martyrs), “Although we might be able to empathize with Christian refusals to worship the emperor, this sort of behavior was for some the kind of unnecessary stubbornness that invited trouble. . . . Is it really necessary to refuse to give one’s name in a trial? Even in modern American trials in which defendants regularly ‘take the fifth’ in order to avoid answering questions, they’re not usually evasive about their own names. To the Romans, and in anyone’s estimation, the Christians were difficult in the courtroom.” The problem with this conclusion is that it assesses the situation purely from the perspective of the dominant elite. In the ancient world, oftentimes, names revealed a lot more than just a person’s appellation. Indeed, names could reveal familial origin, location, allegiances, and more. From the subject perspective, if Christians were fearful of further persecution for their family, it is not unthinkable, then, for the response to be vague in order to protect others. Fifth, her reconstruction of religio-political issues in the Roman world suggest not the absence of increased hostility in the second and third centuries CE, but just the opposite. Moss, *Myth*, 175–176 accurately states, “The Christians, as is by now clear, would not participate in the imperial cult, and to the Romans, this state of affairs was dangerous. From an ancient perspective, the presence of a religiously non-compliant group in any community was a threat to that community. Human flourishing was a delicate affair, and religion was one way in which health, political success, independence, good harvest, fine weather, and all aspects of everyday life were managed. The Christians threatened all of this. They threatened to disrupt the *pax deorum* (‘peace of the gods’) and, in doing so, invited destruction on everyone. For the Romans, Christians’ nonparticipation in the imperial cult was threatening. Their stubbornness was not just disrespectful and iconoclastic; it could potentially bring down the empire. . . . Christian subversiveness was, in the eyes of the Romans, far-reaching and dangerous.” Therefore, while Moss’s work positively encourages further discussion regarding hagiography and historicity, her broad conclusions of the socio-historical context of the second and third centuries are deficient.

Ignatius,⁸⁵ Christians experience an increase in the physical persecution that leads to death. The trials of Christians under Pliny the Younger (*ca.* 111 CE),⁸⁶ the martyrdom of Polycarp—the bishop of Smyrna (*ca.* 155 CE),⁸⁷ and the persecution of Christians under Marcus Aurelius in Lyons (*ca.* 177 CE),⁸⁸ to name a few, exemplify heightened physical persecution of Christians in the second century.⁸⁹ This possibly prompted the composition of Tertullian's *Apologeticus* (*ca.* 197 CE) to absolve Christians of further physical persecution. Nevertheless, this precedent continues throughout the third century with the persecutions of Decius (*ca.* 250 CE) and Diocletian (*ca.* 284 CE).⁹⁰

As James C. Scott advises, the manifestation of violence in the public transcript does not indicate the initial point of tension between the sovereigns and the subjects. Instead, the violence of a peasant revolt⁹¹ is evidence of tension that existed below the surface for quite some time (i.e., 'offstage' in the hidden transcripts). Similarly, the dramatic display of physical persecution toward Christians in the second and third centuries suggests the time period that led up to these manifestations of violence contained latent tension between the Roman society and the Christian community. As a result, it is odd to assume that Domitian's reign, and even his brother and father before him, was only congenial towards the Christians in light of what follows shortly thereafter.

A more believable reconstruction is an atmosphere of tension under Domitian in which non-physical persecution was heightened and which, at times, resulted in physical persecution (sometimes even death). This was then exacerbated early in the second century under Trajan and progressed in intensity thereafter. This explanation not only fits the historical evidence more adequately, but also coincides with the picture depicted in Revelation described above.

85 Ign. Rom. 5; Eusebius, *Chron.* 2120; *The Martyrdom of Ignatius*.

86 Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96. For more discussion, see below.

87 *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*.

88 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.1. For a full discussion, see Richard Heath, "Lyons," 177–183.

89 Tessa Rajak, *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome: Studies in Cultural and Social Interaction* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 301; Laura Salah Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture: The Second-Century Church Amid the Spaces of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 137–139.

90 For further study, see W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965; repr., Cambridge: James Clarke, 2008).

91 Scott, *Domination*, xiii, 102.

A New Way Forward: The Persecution of Christians Under Domitian

So is there evidence to support such a setting for Christians under the reign of Domitian? Three trajectories of the socio-historical context coalesce to provide an answer: [1] the Anti-Jewish propaganda of the Flavian Dynasty, [2] an intensification of the Anti-Jewish environment in Domitian's reign, and [3] the lack of distinction between the Christians and the Jews after 70 CE.

Anti-Jewish Propaganda of the Flavian Dynasty

The relationship between the Jewish people and the Roman Empire in the Julio-Claudian dynasty was full of highs and lows.⁹² Even though Julius Caesar and Augustus were generally convivial with the Jewish people, the reigns of Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius were not as cordial. The Jews were expelled from Rome in the reigns of both Tiberius⁹³ and Claudius,⁹⁴ and Caligula even attempted to have a statue placed in the temple in Jerusalem.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, these actions were more the exception in the Julio-Claudian dynasty rather than the rule. After the Jewish rebellion of 66–70 CE, however, the accession of the Flavian dynasty inaugurated a distinct shift. As Martin Goodman notes, “The conquest of Judaea in 70 CE was celebrated in Rome with a degree of hostile propaganda unique in Roman celebration of a suppressed revolt.”⁹⁶ In fact, as seen below, the victory of the Jewish War served as “the foundational myth” for the entire Flavian dynasty.⁹⁷

92 See G. La Piana, “Foreign Groups in Rome during the First Centuries of the Empire,” *HTR* 20 (1927): 349–390; Kraybill, *Imperial*, 172–173; Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak, “Introduction,” in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (eds. Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak; London: Routledge, 1992), xiv.

93 Tac., *Ann.* 2.85; Suet., *Tib.* 36.

94 Suet., *Claud.* 25.4. Cf. Dio Cass. 66.6.6.

95 Josephus, *Ant.* 18.256–308.

96 Martin Goodman, “The *Fiscus Iudaicus* and Gentile Attitudes to Judaism in Flavian Rome,” in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (eds. Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James Rives; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 170. Goodman goes on to write, “The suppression of other revolts in the Julio-Claudian period left no mark at all in the city of Rome itself . . . By contrast, the civic centre was largely remodeled to reflect the victory over the Jews and their God” (p. 171). See also Mason, *New Testament*, 231; Rowland, *Heaven*, 412.

97 James Rives, “Flavian Religious Policy and the Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple,” in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (eds. Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, James Rives; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 156. Jonathan Edmondson, “Introduction:

The Flavians suffered from a lack of imperial heritage since they were not a part of the Julio-Claudian line.⁹⁸ As a result, they were “hungry for propaganda”⁹⁹ to justify their claim to the throne. Just as Augustus used his victory over Mark Antony and Cleopatra to validate his claim to the throne, so too did the Flavians exploit the Judean revolt as their “battle of Actium.”¹⁰⁰ The subjugation of the Jewish people not only restored peace to an empire in disarray, but it also functioned as a justification for the perpetual reign of the Flavian family.¹⁰¹ The Anti-Jewish sentiment in the Flavian Dynasty, therefore, was intensified due to its centrality in their foundational myth, evident in: [1] the Flavian Roman triumph in 71 CE; [2] the Flavian reconstruction of the city of Rome; [3] Flavian numismatics; and [4] the implementation of the *fiscus Iudaicus*.

The Flavian Roman Triumph in 71 CE

In *J.W.* 7.116–157, Josephus gives a detailed, eyewitness account of the elaborate Roman triumph celebrated for the Flavian victory “over their enemies” (7.157).¹⁰² The entire city of Rome attended the spectacle (7.122) to watch the spoils of war paraded through the streets, which included silver, gold, and ivory “running along like a river” (7.134). Along with seven hundred of the most “eminently tall and handsome” captives (7.118),¹⁰³ elaborate depictions of “many

Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome,” in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (eds. by Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James Rives; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 32, suggests that this point is a rare consensus among scholars. For the significance of origin stories, see Friesen, *Imperial*, 123.

98 Suet., *Vesp.* 1.1.

99 John M.G. Barclay, “The Empire Writes Back: Josephan Rhetoric in Flavian Rome,” in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (eds. Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James Rives; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 324. See also Rajak, *Josephus*, 189–190; Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 155 (n. 102).

100 Edmondson, “Introduction,” 8; Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, “Reading Hebrews in Flavian Rome,” *USQR* 59 (2005): 85; Rajak, *Josephus*, 203. For further discussion, see Chapter 3 above.

101 Timothy Barnes, “The Sack of the Temple in Josephus and Tacitus,” in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (eds. Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James Rives; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 129–144; Mason, *New Testament*, 46.

102 All Josephus quotes that follow are from *The Works of Josephus* (trans. William Whiston; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1987) unless otherwise noted. Rajak, *Josephus*, 218; Kraybill, *Imperial*, 143–144 (n. 11). For discussion of the Roman triumph in imperial propaganda, see pp. 103–108.

103 This detail emphasizes the magnificence of Rome’s accomplishment: the greater the appearance of the enemy, the greater the victory of the Romans. The same logic is used

resemblances of the war" (7.142), from a variety of locations throughout the entire rebellion, were heralded throughout the procession. These images celebrated the subjugation of the Jewish people (the 'enemy').

For there was to be seen a happy country laid waste, and entire squadrons of enemies slain; while some of them ran away, and some were carried into captivity; with walls of great altitude and magnitude overthrown, and ruined by machines; with the strongest fortifications taken, and the walls of most populous cities upon the tops of hills seized on, and an army pouring itself within the walls; as also every place full of slaughter, and supplications of the enemies, when they were no longer able to lift up their hands in way of opposition. (7.143–144)

According to Josephus, these depictions allowed the audience to experience the battles, "affording a most lively portraiture of itself" (7.142), in such vivid representation that it was "as if they had been there really present" (7.147).¹⁰⁴

The most elaborate depictions, however, were reserved for the destruction of the temple itself (7.148). Certain elements from the razed holy place caught Josephus's attention in the procession: the "golden table, of the weight of many talents," the candlestick "made of gold" (7.148), and, with "the last of all the spoils," "the Law of the Jews" (7.150).

The conclusion of the Roman triumph highlighted the grand entrance of the three key figures of the newly inaugurated Flavian dynasty. Vespasian and Titus both rode in the traditional *quadriga* reserved for the triumphant general, while Domitian rode beside them on a "horse that was worthy of admiration" (7.152). The procession came to a halt at the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, where, according to Josephus, the "Roman custom" was to stand still until the announcement of the parade's climactic moment: the execution of the key enemy leader (7.153). When word came that the "general of the enemy," Simon bar Giora (7.153–154), had been executed, great jubilation erupted and a magnificent feast began (7.156). "For this was a festival day to the city of Rome . . . for the end was now put to their civil miseries, and for the commencement of their hopes of future prosperity and happiness" (7.157).

The Roman triumph of 71 CE, then, was more than a mere celebration of the subjugation of an "enemy of Rome;" it was also the public pronouncement of the succession of a new dynasty. As Mary Beard accurately states, Josephus

for those in the "great number of the captives" dressed in a variety of garments to conceal "from the sight the deformity of their bodies" (7.138).

104 Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 162, 242; Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 148–149.

“picked up the official spin and made the spectacular ceremonial of 71 the key dynastic moment where Julio-Claudian history stopped—and Flavian history started.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, the destruction of the Jewish people in Flavian propaganda is not merely an example of military prowess, but it is also a powerful symbol of the Flavian legitimacy to reign.¹⁰⁶ Naturally, this creates an environment that intensifies Anti-Jewish sentiments across the empire.

The Flavian Reconstruction of the City of Rome

The Jewish subjugation was not just celebrated in the moment of the Roman triumph; the Flavian dynasty cemented the display of their dominance over the Jewish people into the structure of the city of Rome itself.¹⁰⁷ During the reign of Nero and the internal conflict in 68–69 CE, the city of Rome endured significant alterations, many would say for the worse. As a result, Vespasian inaugurated an extensive rebuilding program (carried on by his sons) in the city of Rome intending to restore Rome to herself.¹⁰⁸ Aware of this significant opportunity, the Flavians utilized this renovation to decorate the city with their dynastic propaganda, and their central choice of imagery was the victory over the Jews. As Jonathan Edmondson notes, “The defeat of the Jews and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple were enshrined in the very fabric of the urban centre and hence in Roman public memory, reminding the inhabitants of the city of the decisive role played by Vespasian and Titus in that victory.”¹⁰⁹ Three Flavian constructions demonstrate the perpetuation of their ‘foundational myth’: [1] The *Templum Pacis* (‘Temple of Peace’); [2] The Arch of Titus; and [3] the Colosseum.

In 75 CE, Vespasian completed the construction of the temple of Peace, which was funded by the spoils from the Jewish War.¹¹⁰ More significantly, the temple of Peace celebrated the Flavian defeat of the Jews by adorning the Flavian monument with the cultic vessels from the temple in Jerusalem, including the massive golden table and the golden candlestick featured in the

105 Mary Beard, “The Triumph of Flavius Josephus,” in *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (eds. A.J. Boyle and W.J. Dominik; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 558. See also Rajak, *Josephus*, 213, 218; Mason, *New Testament*, 231.

106 Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 155 (n. 102).

107 Aitken, “Reading,” 83; Fergus Millar, “Last Year in Jerusalem: Monuments of the Jewish War in Rome,” in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (eds. Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James Rives; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 101–128.

108 Martial, *Spect.* 2.11–12.

109 Edmondson, “Introduction,” 22.

110 Josephus, *J.W.* 7.158–159.

Roman triumph of 71 CE.¹¹¹ This declared that the peace of Rome restored by the Flavians was inextricably linked to the subjugation of the Jewish nation in 70 CE.

Similarly, Domitian completed two other structures in the city of Rome changing the landscape of the city and enshrining the defeat of the Jewish people: the Arch of Titus¹¹² and the Colosseum.¹¹³ Domitian erected the Arch of Titus in 82 CE in honor of his brother's victory over the Jewish people. This static propaganda depicts the spoils of the Jewish war—with the central focus on the golden menorah¹¹⁴—frozen in time and cemented into the memory of the empire as key symbols of the Flavian 'foundational myth.' This arch stands in the shadow of the Flavian Amphitheater also known as the Colosseum. Like the temple of Peace, the Colosseum was built with the treasures acquired from the Jewish War.¹¹⁵ As a result, the gladiatorial games that filled the Colosseum and celebrated Roman dominance were housed in the structure financed by Jewish subjugation.

Thus, the Flavian dynasty satisfied its thirst for imperial propaganda by exploiting the suffering and destruction of the Jewish people in 70 CE. To insure that the message of Flavian dominance was secure, Vespasian and his sons reconstructed the city of Rome, devastated by the civil wars, with the conquest of the Jewish people as their central symbol of victory. This 'foundational myth'

111 Josephus, *J.W.* 7.148, 160–161. Josephus continues in 7.162, "But still he gave orders that they should lay up their Law, and the purple veils of the holy place, in the royal palace itself, and keep them there." See also Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 163. For the significance of similar actions by the Seleucid Empire, see Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 151, 153.

112 The Arch of Titus described here is located on the *Via Sacra* near the Roman Forum. The remains of another arch in the Circus Maximus is also thought to have been dedicated to Titus, constructed in his lifetime, and also in celebration of the triumph over the Jewish people (Aitken, "Reading," 83). Steve Mason describes the message of this alternate Arch of Titus, "The main points come out in the inscription on the arch of Titus that formerly stood in the Circus Maximus: under his father's guidance Titus had 'subdued the people of the Judaeans and destroyed the city of Hierosolyma' . . . Everyone knew what 'subdued' and 'destroyed' meant: a barbarian *urbs direpta*, demolished by the irresistible ferocity of Roman arms and then given to the soldiers for revenge" ("Figured Speech," 254–255).

113 Construction on the Colosseum (or the 'Flavian Amphitheater') began under Vespasian and was likely finished under Titus in 80 CE. Nevertheless, Domitian added the underground tunnels as well as more seating in the Colosseum to complete the structure that stands today. For further discussion, see Keith Hopkins and Mary Beard, *The Colosseum* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.

114 Rives, "Flavian," 152.

115 Edmondson, "Introduction," 10.



FIGURE 5.1 71 CE. Dedicated to Vespasian in celebration of Jewish subjugation.

VESPASIAN: RIC 424. IMAGE USED WITH PERMISSION OF CLASSICAL NUMISMATIC GROUP, INC. (<WWW.CNGCOINS.COM>).

embedded in the very buildings of Flavian Rome would naturally cultivate an environment of Anti-Jewish sentiment.¹¹⁶

Flavian Numismatics

As discussed in chapter three, coins are billboards for imperial propaganda. The images and captions of each coin are an opportunity for the sovereign narrative to be communicated to the subjects of the empire. So evidence of Anti-Jewish sentiment in the Flavian dynasty, if it truly existed, would naturally find a place in this static propaganda.

Beginning in 71 CE, Vespasian minted coins heralding the subjugation of the Jewish people, as seen above. The obverse of the coin shows Vespasian crowned with laurel worn in the Roman triumph¹¹⁷ with a caption that celebrates him as the victorious general and emperor of the Roman Empire. On the reverse of the coin, a Jewish female is seated in a position of mourning while a Jewish male stands behind a palm tree and in front of a pile of weapons with

¹¹⁶ For architecture's communicative impact, see Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 12; Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 82.

¹¹⁷ Josephus, *J.W.* 7.124.

his hands bound behind his back. The caption articulates what the imagery connotes: *IUDEA CAPTA*. Judea had been captured.¹¹⁸

This coin was the first in a series of coins, with similar imagery and captions, minted to celebrate the defeat of the Jewish people.¹¹⁹ The coins all communicated the same message: Rome had captured Judea. This coinage, however, was not limited to the reign of Vespasian. Indeed, around 79 CE, Titus minted coins celebrating the triumph over the Jewish people,¹²⁰ and even though Domitian did not have a direct role in the Jewish War, he issued coins with *IUDEA CAPTA* as late as 85 CE—fifteen years after the war ended.¹²¹

The depictions on these celebratory coins and the consistency with which they were minted throughout all three Flavian emperors indicate the centrality of the Jewish War to their ‘foundational myth.’ The Flavians used the Roman coinage as imperial billboards to communicate the Anti-Jewish sentiment which fueled their legitimacy to the throne. “Judea had been captured,” and the Flavians had begun to reign.

The Implementation of the fiscus Iudaicus

The Roman civil wars in 69 CE not only contributed to the instability of the entire empire, but the structures in the city of Rome itself also suffered from the war. In fact, the Capitoline temple dedicated to Jupiter was completely destroyed by fire. Tacitus laments this calamity:

This was the most deplorable and disgraceful event that had happened to the Commonwealth of Rome since the foundation of the city; for now, assailed by no foreign enemy, with Heaven ready to be propitious, had our vices only allowed, the seat of Jupiter Supremely Good and Great, founded by our ancestors with solemn auspices to be the pledge of

118 As Edmondson, “Introduction,” 10 suggests, the similarity between this Flavian coin (*IUDEA CAPTA*) and Augustus’ coin minted to celebrate the victory of the Battle of Actium (*AEGYPTO CAPTA*) should not be overlooked. In the same manner that the battle of Actium inaugurated Augustus’s reign, so too did the victory of the Jewish War inaugurate the reign of the Flavians. Both battles, then, served as their particular ‘foundational myths’ to legitimize their claim to the throne.

119 Vespasian: *RIC* 393, 424, 425, 426, 427, 489, 490, 491, 595, 596. The coins are in all denominations of Roman coinage with approximately forty-eight different variations currently known [Howard B. Brin, *Catalog of Judaea Capta Coinage* (Minneapolis: Emmett, 1986)].

120 Titus: *RIC* 91, 92, 93, 128, 141.

121 Domitian: *RIC* 280. See also, J.M. Cody, “Conquerors and Conquered on Flavian Coins,” in *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (eds. A.J. Boyle and W.J. Dominik; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 105–113.

Empire . . . was destroyed by the madness of our Emperors. (Tac., *Hist.* 3.72 [Church and Brodribb])

Immediately, Vespasian seized the opportunity to gain favor for the Flavian dynasty by rebuilding the temple to Jupiter.¹²² However, he did so in a manner that celebrated the defeat of the Jewish nation.

For decades, the Roman Empire allowed the Jewish people to pay a tax to support the temple in Jerusalem, causing some enmity throughout the empire.¹²³ After the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, though, the Flavians did not allow the Jewish people to rebuild this cultic center, which was a source of both identity and rebellion. As a result, the Jewish tax paid to the temple in Jerusalem was now redirected to Rome to pay for the restoration of the temple to Jupiter—a tax known as the *fiscus Iudaicus* (Jewish Tax).¹²⁴

Symbolically, the *fiscus Iudaicus* communicated at least three key messages. First, the Roman Jupiter had conquered the Jewish Yahweh. The destruction of the Jewish temple by ‘pagans’ was difficult enough, but now, the Jewish people, through the *fiscus Iudaicus*, were to fund the construction and upkeep of a pagan god. As Edmondson notes, “The victory of Jupiter over Yahweh could not have been advertised more dramatically.”¹²⁵

Second, the tax was punishment to the Jews for their rebellion. Rome was not content with retribution on the Jewish rebels alone. The *fiscus Iudaicus* “fell as much on the Jews of Egypt and of Rome as on the suppressed rebels of Judea.”¹²⁶ Through this tax, all of the Jewish people in the empire were punished for the rebellion.

Third, the tax was a clarion call to the Jewish people to integrate into Rome. As Martin Goodman suggests, the redirection of the Jewish tax from the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem to the temple of Jupiter in Rome communicated, both symbolically and practically, that “the Flavian state had brought Jewish worship to an end.”¹²⁷ Unable to acquire the necessary funds, the Jewish hope to rebuild their cultic center in Jerusalem was distinctly mitigated. The result, as James Rives notes, was to offer “another structure that endowed the Jews with a distinctive corporate identity . . . the new tax, payable as it was to Jupiter

122 Barbara Levick, *Vespasian* (London: Routledge, 1999), 126.

123 Cicero, *Flac.* 67.

124 Josephus, *J.W.* 7.218. Agourides, “Character,” 133 surmises that “the Christians, being still so much identified with the Jews, also paid the same tax.”

125 Edmondson, “Introduction,” 11.

126 Goodman, “*Fiscus*,” 170.

127 Goodman, “*Fiscus*,” 170.

Optimus Maximus, clearly worked to link the Jews to Rome and its god.”¹²⁸ This tax, then, pressured the Jewish people to conform to the Roman sovereign narrative and perpetuated Anti-Jewish sentiments throughout the Roman Empire.

Summary

The Flavian dynasty needed substantive justification to replace the Julio-Claudian line.¹²⁹ So the Flavians reformulated the suppression of the Jewish rebellion in 70 CE into a magnificent victory over a foreign ‘enemy’ satisfying their need for dynastic propaganda.¹³⁰ As Martin Goodman notes, “The new emperor could boast of no other achievements, so he made as much capital as he could from the defeat of the Jews.”¹³¹ Through both static and enacted propaganda, the defeat of the Jews behaved as a ‘foundational myth’ for the Flavian dynasty cemented into the ever present memory of the Roman and Jewish communities.

As a result, an Anti-Jewish atmosphere was fostered throughout the Roman Empire. As Rives concludes, “the Jewish War no doubt led the Roman elite to view Jewish tradition with increased hostility.”¹³² Indeed, following the events of 70 CE, Roman writers found it difficult at times to restrain their hatred for the Jewish people,¹³³ just as entire cities expressed Anti-Jewish hostility both

128 Rives, “Flavian,” 164 (n. 28). Rives does credit this idea to conversations with Martin Goodman. For discussion on the economic impact of the *fiscus Iudaicus*, see E.M. Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule from Pompey to Diocletian* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 371–377.

129 Martin Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea: the Origins of the Jewish Revolt Against Rome AD 66–70* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 236.

130 For the intentional reformulation of the suppression of the ‘Jewish revolt’ into the victory over a ‘foreign nation,’ see Susan Mattern, *Rome and the Enemy: Imperial Strategy in the Principate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 151, 193.

131 Goodman, “*Fiscus*,” 171. See also Rajak, *Josephus*, 189–190, 203, 213.

132 Rives, “Flavian,” 155 (n. 15), in reference to Goodman, *Ruling*, 236–239. Rowland, *Heaven*, 412 adds, “Whenever the official attitude was rather negative, anti-Semitic feeling tended to increase. Philo makes this point in the *Embassy to Gaius* 135ff., where he argues that official hostility to Judaism was the direct cause of anti-Semitism in Alexandria.” See also Steve Mason, “Flavius Josephus in Flavian Rome: Reading on and Between the Lines,” in *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (eds. A.J. Boyle and W.J. Dominik; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 561; idem, “Of Audience and Meaning: Reading Josephus’ *Bellum Judaicum* in the Context of a Flavian Audience,” in *Josephus and Jewish History in Flavian Rome and Beyond* (eds. Gaia Lembi and Joseph Sievers; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 99; idem, *New Testament*, 231.

133 Rajak, “Jewish Community,” 9. Tacitus writes in *Histories* (Church and Brodribb): Jews are “detested by the gods” (5.3); Jews possessed “a novel form of worship [given by Moses], opposed to all that is practiced by other men. Things sacred with us, with them have no

during and after the Jewish War.¹³⁴ Even the Christian historian Eusebius, in discussion of Hegesippus' records, states, "[Hegesippus] also relates that Vespasian after the conquest of Jerusalem gave orders that all that belonged to the lineage of David should be sought out, in order that none of the royal race might be left among the Jews; and in consequence of this a most terrible persecution again hung over the Jews."¹³⁵ While this previous quote is likely overstated, the significance of the statement to the time period should not be missed: the Flavian dynasty fostered an environment of Anti-Jewish sentiment due to the centrality of the subjugation of the Jewish people in the Flavian propaganda.

Intensification of the Anti-Jewish Environment in Domitian's Reign

During Domitian's reign, the Anti-Jewish environment intensified. Like his father and brother, Domitian suffered from a lack of imperial lineage to justify his reign,¹³⁶ and yet unlike his father and brother, Domitian had no military accomplishments on which to rely. Domitian had been too young to take part in the victory of the Jewish War,¹³⁷ and when he attempted military conquest in Gaul and Germany at the beginning of Vespasian's reign, it resulted in memorable embarrassment for the brash young prince.¹³⁸ Consequently, Domitian seems to overemphasize the Flavian dynastic glory acquired in the subjugation of the Jewish people in 70 CE, disguising the insecurity of his meager credentials to claim the throne. Hence, an intensification of the Anti-Jewish

sanctity, while they allow what with us is forbidden" (5.4); Jews also have "all their other customs, which are at once perverse and disgusting, owe their strength to their very badness" (5.5); and "the Jewish religion is tasteless and mean" (5.5).

¹³⁴ Josephus, *J.W.* 2.457–93, 559; 7.108–11, 367–8.

¹³⁵ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.12.

¹³⁶ Domitian's concern is evident in his building efforts that emphasize the exaltation of Vespasian and Titus as well as draw visual connections between the Flavian dynasty and Augustus. See Edmondson, "Introduction," 11–12; Jones, *Domitian*, 79–98.

¹³⁷ Southern, *Domitian*, 17–23. It is true that Domitian did take part in the Roman triumph in 71 CE, but Josephus notes (*J.W.* 7.152) that Domitian did not ride in the *quadriga* with his father and brother, reserved for the victorious general(s) of the war. Instead, he rode on a horse next to them, thereby participating in the glory of the parade but with a clear distinction of his actual role in the war itself.

¹³⁸ Suet., *Dom.* 2; Tac., *Hist.* 4.75–86. Tac., *Hist.* 4.86 even suggests that Domitian unsuccessfully attempted to commandeer some of the army to overthrow his father and brother.

environment arose in the time of Domitian which is evident in: [1] Imperial Actions; [2] Imperial Writings; and [3] Policy Shifts Under Nerva.¹³⁹

Domitianic Imperial Actions

Two imperial actions in the time of Domitian suggest an intensification of the Anti-Jewish environment: [1] the unique implementation of the *fiscus Iudaicus* and [2] the execution of Clemens and the exile of Domitilla. At the beginning of Domitian's reign, the exaggerated rigor and possible expansion of the collection of the *fiscus Iudaicus* precipitates an atmosphere at the end of his reign in which punishment for 'Jewish living' could even involve the execution and exile of prominent Roman elites.

In the early to mid-80s, multiple factors required Domitian to generate more funds.¹⁴⁰ At the beginning of his reign, Domitian benevolently nullified debts and declined taxable inheritances; these altruistic actions did not capitalize on possible income for the empire.¹⁴¹ In 82 CE, Domitian renovated the imperial coinage drastically increasing the metal standards for all newly minted coins, a standard only rivaled by Augustus himself.¹⁴² In addition, at the end of the Chattan War in 83 CE, Domitian awarded the imperial army a significant raise.¹⁴³

139 In addition to these three lines of inquiry, the building projects and numismatics under Domitian also contributed to an Anti-Jewish environment (see pp. 153–156 above). Outside of his imperial palace on the Palatine hill (Suet., *Dom.* 14; Martial 1.70; 8.36; 9.13; 12.15), Domitian rebuilt the temple of Jupiter after a fire in 80 CE (Dio Cass. 66.24; cf. Suet., *Dom.* 5), erected the Arch of Titus, and completed the Colosseum [see Leon Yarden, *The Spoils of Jerusalem on the Arch of Titus: A Re-investigation* (Stockholm: Astroms, 1991)]. For more discussion on the building program under Domitian, see James C. Anderson, Jr., "A Topographical Tradition in Fourth Century Chronicles: Domitian's Building Program," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 32.1 (1983): 93–105; Jean L. Girard, "Domitien et Minerve: une prédilection impériale," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung* (ed. Wolfgang Haase; Berlin: Gruyter, 1981), 233–245. Regarding numismatics (as described above on pp. 155–156), fifteen years after the Jewish war ended, Domitian (in 85 CE) issued a coin with the caption: *IUDEA CAPTA* (RIC 280). See Goodman, "Fiscus," 171.

140 For a more detailed discussion of the dating of the *fiscus Iudaicus* under Domitian and the argumentation utilized below, see Williams, "Domitian," 204.

141 Suet., *Dom.* 9 and 21; Southern, *Domitian*, 53.

142 Southern, *Domitian*, 53, 60. Southern also points out, "For three years these high standards prevailed, then in 85 there was a debasement of the fine metal content that took the coinage back to the Neronian standard of 64, which was still higher than the standard with which Vespasian and Titus had operated. The coinage remained at this level for the rest of Domitian's reign" (p. 61).

143 Suet., *Dom.* 12.1; Dio Cass. 67.3.5.

As a result, the financial situation in Rome developed into a significant problem, and regardless of Domitian's initial attempts, he "had difficulty in easing his burdens."¹⁴⁴

Embarrassed, Domitian employed questionable methods to accumulate wealth "resorting to every sort of robbery."¹⁴⁵ Dio Cassius relays the disgraceful actions: "For, as he had no funds from which to make his expenditures, he murdered many men, hauling some of them before the senate, but bringing charges against others when they were not even present in Rome. He even went so far as to put some out of the way treacherously by means of drugs secretly administered."¹⁴⁶ Domitian's unique and sometimes cruel methods to alleviate the financial strain¹⁴⁷ intersected with the Anti-Jewish trajectories of the Flavian dynasty in an intensification of the *fiscus Iudaicus*.

Although scholars debate whether Domitian expanded the Jewish tax or merely "closed the loopholes,"¹⁴⁸ the majority of scholars agree that the *fiscus*

144 Suet., *Dom.* 12.1 (Rolfe, LCL).

145 Ibid.

146 Dio Cass. 67.4.5 (Cary, LCL). Dio Cassius 67.4.6 (Cary, LCL) continues, "Many of the peoples tributary to the Romans revolted when contributions of money were forcibly extorted from them; among these were the Nasamones. They massacred all the tax-collectors and so completely defeated Flaccus, the governor of Numidia, who proceeded against them, that they even plundered his camp." In agreement, Suet., *Dom.* 12 states, "Reduced to financial straits by the cost of his buildings and shows, as well as by the additions which he had made to the pay of the soldiers, he tried to lighten the military expenses by diminishing the number of his troops; but perceiving that in this way he exposed himself to the attacks of the barbarians, and nevertheless had difficulty in easing his burdens, he had no hesitation in resorting to every sort of robbery. The property of the living and the dead was seized everywhere on any charge brought by any accuser. It was enough to allege any action or word derogatory to the majesty of the prince. Estates of those in no way connected with him were confiscated, if but one man came forward to declare that he had heard from the deceased during his lifetime that Caesar was his heir" (Rolfe, LCL).

147 In response to the accusation that this situation suffers from historical embellishment, Southern, *Domitian*, 61, writes, "The confiscations are too well attested (though they are perhaps exaggerated in scale) to deny that they occurred. They were certainly in evidence towards the end of Domitian's reign, as attested by Pliny's story of Corellius Rufus, old and very sick, but determined to live through his constant pain at least one day longer than the Emperor in order to deprive the robber (*latronus*) of the pleasure of claiming his property."

148 For the 'expansion' perspective see Keresztes, "Jews," 3. For the 'loophole' perspective see Parker, "Domitian," 36. For a mediating position, see Agourides, "Character," 199.

Iudaicus was collected with intensified rigor.¹⁴⁹ Suetonius, *Dom.* 12.2 (Rolfe, LCL) concurs, “Besides other taxes, that on the Jews was levied *with the utmost rigour*, and those were prosecuted who without publicly acknowledging that faith yet lived as Jews, as well as those who concealed their origin and did not pay the tribute levied upon their people.”¹⁵⁰ That the intensification was motivated by financial difficulties in no way eliminates that this was a type of persecution against the Jews.¹⁵¹ As Jonathan Edmondson notes, “The operations of the *fiscus Iudaicus* seem to have become even more intrusive under Domitian, as general hostility towards the Jews increased.”¹⁵²

In particular, Suetonius records a striking eyewitness account of the extent to which this tax was enforced under Domitian in Rome: “I recall being present in my youth when the person of a man ninety years old was examined before the procurator and a very crowded court, to see whether he was circumcised” (*Dom.* 12.2 [Rolfe, LCL]).¹⁵³ In an honor/shame society, to be stripped naked in public would have been appalling, especially for a Jew who found this to be completely odious.¹⁵⁴ Ronald Syme concludes, “The ruthless exaction of the *Fiscus Iudaicus* is not a mere by-product of financial straits, but is something very much like a persecution.”¹⁵⁵

149 Williams, “Domitian,” 200–201; Edmondson, “Introduction,” 11; Fiorenza, *Justice*, 194; cf. Thompson, *Revelation*, 134.

150 *Emphasis* added. Suetonius appears to identify two groups: [1] proselytes to Judaism and [2] those born Jewish. In light of the point in Williams, “Domitian,” 199, that “proselytes on conversion literally became Jews,” those who “lived as Jews,” as Suetonius describes them, were liable to pay the Jewish tax [see also E.M. Smallwood, “Domitian’s Attitude toward the Jews and Judaism,” *CP* 51 (1956): 1–13; Keresztes, “Jews,” 4–5]. The second group is those who were born Jews but avoided the tax, possibly due to their apostasy or in rejection of the symbolic subjugation of the Jewish people [see K.J. Neumann, *Der römische Staat und die allgemeine Kirche bis auf Diocletian* (Leipzig: Veit, 1890), 1.7; Adolf Hausrath, *Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte* (Heidelberg: Bassermann, 1874), 3.296]. It is possible, then, that both groups could have contained Christians [so George Edmundson, *The Church in Rome in the First Century* (London: Longmans, 1913), 222].

151 Shirley Jackson Case, “Josephus’ Anticipation of a Domitianic Persecution,” *JBL* 44.1/2 (1925): 12–13; Keresztes, “Jews,” 3.

152 Edmondson, “Introduction,” 11.

153 Jones, *Domitian*, 76 (based on Suet., *Nero* 57.2) suggests a date for the following event in Suet., *Dom.* 12.2 as 88 CE.

154 1 Macc. 1:11–15.

155 Ronald Syme, “The Imperial Finances under Domitian, Nerva and Trajan,” *JRS* 20 (1930): 67 (n. 2). Some maintain that Domitian was neutral toward the Jews in his collection of the tax and Suet., *Dom.* 12.2 is merely an example of Domitian’s meticulousness. In response, Williams, “Domitian,” 203 states, “This interpretation, common though it is, is

Domitian's actions in the *fiscus Iudaicus* reveal an imperial atmosphere in which Anti-Jewish sentiments were intensified; this is accentuated through his actions in 95 CE toward the prominent, noble Roman couple Clemens and Domitilla. Dio Cassius records a startling account:

And the same year Domitian slew, along with many others, Flavius Clemens the consul, although he was a cousin and had to wife Flavia Domitilla, who was also a relative of the emperor's. The charge brought against them both was that of atheism, a charge on which many others who drifted into Jewish ways were condemned. Some of these were put to death, and the rest were at least deprived of their property. Domitilla was merely banished to Pandateria.¹⁵⁶

The two-fold accusation of 'atheism'¹⁵⁷ and 'Jewish living' has caused endless speculation as to whether Flavius Clemens and Flavia Domitilla were converts to Judaism¹⁵⁸ or converts to Christianity.¹⁵⁹ Even though a precise conclusion

impossible to accept. [1] No evidence is ever offered in support of the contention that Suetonius is exaggerating and there is no reason to suppose that he was. [2] None of his other personal reminiscences about his adulescentia is ever criticized on this score. Why should this one be treated any differently? [3] That the incident itself is inherently plausible is confirmed by Martial VII.82—a contemporary poem whose humour resides in the unsuccessful attempts of a certain Menophilus to conceal his circumcision by the means of a giant fibula. This surely shows, given the frequent topicality of Martial's humour, that the deliberate concealment of circumcision was in all likelihood a feature of the time."

156 67.14.1–3 (Cary, LCL). See also Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 8.25; Suet., *Dom.* 15.1 (cf. Tac., *Hist.* 5.4).

157 For discussions on the definition of 'atheism,' see Case, "Josephus," 13 (n. 13); Parker, "Domitian," 35; and Mercer and Leicester, "Domitian," 7.

158 So Thomas W. Africa, *The Immense Majesty: A History of Rome and the Roman Republic* (New York: Crowell, 1974), 238; Keresztes, "Jews," 1–28. For a discussion of 'atheism' as a charge against the Jewish people, see Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.148; Tac., *Hist.* 5.5; Jean Juster, *Les Juifs dans l'empire Romain* (Paris: Burt Franklin, 1914), 1.45ff.; Jan N. Sevenster, *The Roots of Pagan Anti-Semitism in the Ancient World* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 97–8.

159 So Paton J. Gloag, "The Church of St. Clement in Rome (Clemens Romanus)," *GW* 34 (1893): 597; Cyril E. Robinson, *Apollo History of Rome: from 753 BC to AD 410* (New York: Apollo Books, 1965), 328; Harold Mattingly, *Christianity in the Roman Empire* (New York: Norton, 1967), 35. This is primarily based on a combination of Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.18.5—which states that Domitilla was a Christian—and archaeological evidence from catacombs in Rome [see Parker, "Domitian," 37ff.; Knudsen, *Lady*, 24–25]. For discussion of 'atheism' as a charge against the Christians, see Keresztes, "Jews," 9; Heath, "Lyons," 180.

on this issue is highly suspect, the significance of this account, often overlooked, is the disclosure of the magnitude of Domitian's Anti-Jewish sentiments.

In the immediate context preceding Dio Cassius 67.14.1–3, both Vespasian¹⁶⁰ and Titus¹⁶¹ refuse to punish victims of similar accusations leveled against Clemens and Domitilla.¹⁶² Dio Cassius, then, presents Domitian's actions against Clemens and Domitilla as a clear example of Domitian's deviation from the balanced rule of his father and brother.¹⁶³ Whether Clemens and Domitilla were converts of Judaism or Christianity is inconsequential; what is noteworthy is that, according to Domitian, the accusation of 'Jewish living' was sufficient to merit execution and/or banishment of Romans with uniquely high social status.¹⁶⁴ These imperial actions, then, indicate a significant intensification of the Anti-Jewish environment in the reign of Domitian.

Domitianic Imperial Writings

When Domitian is the audience of imperial writers, his interests and sentiments affect not only *what* is written but also *how* it is written. Domitian's intensification of the Anti-Jewish atmosphere is evident in two categories of writings: [1] Anti-Jewish Writings *for* Domitian and [2] Jewish Writings *under* Domitian. While the former contains writing topics influenced by Domitian's particular taste, the latter exhibits writing methods that intend to avoid Domitian's detection. Both categories, however, reveal an atmosphere in which Anti-Jewish sentiments were widespread and, indeed, expected.

Anti-Jewish elements in the writings *for* Domitian are significant in that the author writes in order to connect with his primary audience. As Margaret H. Williams remarks, "... that Domitian was, at the very least, deeply unsympathetic to Jews and Judaism ... is surely indicated quite clearly by the stridently anti-Jewish tone and subject matter of much of the literature that was dedicated to him."¹⁶⁵ In particular, Williams argues that the Anti-Jewish poems by

160 Dio Cass. 66.9.1–3.

161 Dio Cass. 66.19.1–3.

162 Williams, "Domitian," 208, argues forcefully for a connection between 'atheism' and the Latin 'maiestas.' See also Parker, "Domitian," 35.

163 For the effects of 'state terror' on imperial subjects, see Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 141–147, 161 (n. 80).

164 Clemens was a consul with Domitian in 95 CE, and both Clemens and Domitilla were the parents of Domitian's two adopted heirs (both of whom were educated by Quintilian [*Inst.* 4.1.2]). See Suet., *Dom.* 15.1.

165 Williams, "Domitian," 205.

Martial and Quintilian, both writing for Domitian, indicate the poets knew what material their audience would enjoy.¹⁶⁶

According to Williams, the poems of Quintilian and Martial share the same sentiments as Domitian in other areas besides the Anti-Jewish element. She notes Quintilian's "outbursts against philosophers and Domitian's drive against them"¹⁶⁷ and describes Martial as a "conformist in every way" in that "it is hard to find any topic, whether sexual, religious, social or political, where he does not toe the 'party line.'"¹⁶⁸ In other words, both Quintilian and Martial's content reflects the attitudes and sentiments of their audience, Domitian.

With this in place, Williams provides examples of Anti-Jewish elements in Quintilian and Martial. For example, Quintilian refers to Moses as "the founder of the Jewish superstition" and labels the Jews as "a race which is a curse to others."¹⁶⁹ Similarly, Martial mocks the Jewish people for their peculiar practice of circumcision¹⁷⁰ and even their subjugation to Rome.¹⁷¹ With Domitian as the intended audience, the works of Martial and Quintilian indicate that Anti-Jewish attitudes and sentiments were warmly received in the current environment.¹⁷²

To limit the evidence to Anti-Jewish literature written *for* Domitian, though, ignores the significance of the Jewish writings *under* Domitian, particularly the works of Josephus. Traditionally, Josephus's works have been treated as 'straight forward' presentations of history, but recently, historians have questioned the validity of such a conclusion.¹⁷³ Describing the Roman world in the

166 These sources, along with Statius, are considered the 'unbiased writings' by Thompson in his argument against an 'anti-Christian' Domitian.

167 Williams, "Domitian," 197.

168 Williams, "Domitian," 197. In support of this claim, she cites: Martial 1.24; 7.58; 9.27, 47; 6.2 (cf. Suet., *Dom.* 7.1).

169 *Inst.* 3.7.21 (Butler, LCL). Williams, "Domitian," 206 suggests a significant motivation for Quintilian's Anti-Jewish references, "Penned in all probability after the downfall of Quintilian's patron, Flavius Clemens, it is usually seen, and rightly so, as a deliberate attempt on Quintilian's part to demonstrate that he was 'clean' on the sensitive subject of Judaizing, whatever the unfortunate proclivities of his erstwhile patron."

170 Martial 7.30, 35, 82; 11.94. Williams, "Domitian," 205, states, "Book VII, in fact, is notable for the greatest concentration of anti-semitic poems anywhere in Martial." Martial 7.99 dedicates this book to Domitian.

171 Martial 7.55. See also Martial 4.4 and 12.57.

172 Williams, "Domitian," 197–198. Other contemporary and later writers that share this same Anti-Jewish trajectory include: Tac., *Hist.* 5.5.1–13; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 5.33; Origen, *Cels.* 5.41.

173 Josephus's occasion/purpose for writing (e.g., Flavian propaganda, recording of history, Jewish apologetic, etc.) has been widely debated. For further discussion, see Seth Schwartz,

first-century CE, Vasily Rudich writes, “It was an uncanny world of illusion and delusion, of ambivalences and ambiguities on all levels of social interaction.”¹⁷⁴ While the work of James C. Scott labels this type of interaction ‘hidden transcripts,’ the ancient world commonly referred to it as ‘irony.’¹⁷⁵

D.C. Muecke defines irony as “the art of saying something without really saying it. It is an art that gets its effects from below the surface.”¹⁷⁶ As mentioned above, this form of communication was even taught in the schools of rhetoric.¹⁷⁷ Quintilian instructs:

Similar, if not identical with this figure is another, which is *much in vogue at the present time*. For I must now proceed to the discussion of a class of figure *which is of the commonest occurrence* and on which I think I shall be expected to make some comment. It is one whereby we excite some suspicion to indicate that our meaning is other than our words would seem to imply . . . *hidden meaning which is left to the hearer to discover*.¹⁷⁸

According to Quintilian, an environment in which “it is unsafe to speak openly” (9.2.66) is precisely the setting in which ‘irony,’ or ‘hidden transcripts,’ should be used. Indeed, Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 3.13, writing about Domitian’s reign, states, “It used to seem necessary to everyone to lie, on account of fear.”¹⁷⁹

As Steve Mason points out, this elusive practice of irony was known by the Roman rulers¹⁸⁰ and even, at times, attempts to eradicate it were

Josephus and Judaeen Politics (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 1–2, 8, 10–11, 209; Rajak, *Josephus*, 185, 195–197; idem, *Jewish*, 304; Mason, *New Testament*, 233; idem, “Should Any Wish to Enquire Further” (*Ant.* 1.25): The Aim and Audience of Josephus’s *Judean Antiquities/Life*,” in *Understanding Josephus: Seven Perspectives* (ed. Steve Mason; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1998), 73, 78–79; Shaye J.D. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome: His Vita and Development as a Historian* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 86, 97, 232–234.

174 Vasily Rudich, *Political Dissidence under Nero: The Price of Dissimulation* (London: Routledge, 1993), xix.

175 The terms ‘irony’ and ‘hidden transcripts’ are used interchangeably throughout the rest of this part. See Mason, “Figured Speech,” 245–249, for an excellent discussion of ‘irony’ in the ancient world.

176 D.C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: Methuen, 1969), 5.

177 Mason, “Figured Speech,” 248, specifically names the rhetorical discussions of Cicero and Quintilian.

178 *Inst.* 9.2.65 (Butler, LCL) [*emphasis added*].

179 As quoted in Mason, “Figured Speech,” 252. See also Rajak, *Josephus*, 198–199; Mason, “Audience,” 78.

180 Mason, “Figured Speech,” 252.

implemented.¹⁸¹ Domitian, for example, is described as executing Hermogenes of Tarsus “because of some allusions in his History,”¹⁸² as well as Helvidius “alleging that in a farce composed for the stage he had under the characters of Paris and Oenone censured Domitian’s divorce from his wife.”¹⁸³ Regardless, the practice of ‘hidden transcripts’ thrived in the Roman world, even in the works of the Jewish Historian: Flavius Josephus.

Although ‘hidden transcripts’ are found in all of Josephus’s writings,¹⁸⁴ the shift in content and tone between *Jewish War* (written in the time of Vespasian and Titus)¹⁸⁵ and the *Antiquities of the Jews* (written in the reign of Domitian)¹⁸⁶ highlights Domitian’s Anti-Jewish intensification. In the reign of Vespasian, Josephus was favorably treated,¹⁸⁷ probably due to his well-known prophetic proclamation of the forthcoming emperorship of Vespasian.¹⁸⁸ During this time, Josephus wrote *Jewish War*, in which the Romans are generally presented in a favorable light.¹⁸⁹ Written under Domitian’s reign, the *Antiquities of the*

181 Suet., *Aug.* 55; Tac., *Ann.* 4.34–5.

182 Suet., *Dom.* 10.1 (Rolfe, LCL).

183 Ibid., 10.4 (Rolfe, LCL). See also Suet., *Cal.* 27.4; *Nero* 39.3; Tac., *Agr.* 2.1; Dio Cass. 67.13.2.

184 *Jewish War*: 2.390–1; 3.484; 5.412; 6.411 [see Barclay, “Empire,” 329]; 7.85–8 [see Mason, “Figured Speech,” 260–262]. *Vita*: 16 [see Mason, “Figured Speech,” 274–284]. *Against Apion*: 2.125, 131 [see Barclay, “Empire,” 331]; 2.143, 219, 262–264, 281 [see Gunnar Haaland, “Josephus and the Philosophers of Rome.: Does *Contra Apionem* Mirror Domitian’s Crushing of the ‘Stoic Opposition’?”, in *Josephus and Jewish History in Flavian Rome and Beyond* (eds. Joseph Sievers and Gaia Lembi; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 310–315; Cohen, *Josephus*, 240]. *Antiquities of the Jews* is dealt with in more detail below.

185 For a date between 78–81 CE, see C.P. Jones, “Towards a Chronology of Josephus,” *SCIsr* 21 (2002): 113–114; Schwartz, *Josephus*, 15; Cohen, *Josephus*, 84–85; cf. Rajak, *Josephus*, 195; Rajak, *Jewish*, 197. For *J.W.* book 7 as a later addition under Domitian, see Cohen, *Josephus*, 87.

186 Josephus, *Ant.* 20.267 claims that the “sixty-thousand verse” tome was completed in “the thirteenth year of the reign of Caesar Domitian, and the fifty-sixth of my own life.” For a date between September 93 and September 94, see C.P. Jones, “Chronology,” 114–118; Rajak, *Josephus*, 237; cf. Rajak, *Jewish*, 197.

187 Rajak, *Josephus*, 194–195. Cf. Mason, “Should Any Wish,” 74–77.

188 This event was so widely heralded that even Roman writers include it in their history of Vespasian’s accession to the throne. So Suet., *Vesp.* 5.6; Dio Cass. 66.1.4.

189 Case, “Josephus,” 12; Cohen, *Josephus*, 234. For discussion on the intended audience of *J.W.* and *Ant.*, see Mason, “Audience,” 99; Rajak, *Jewish*, 197; Mason, “Should Any Wish,” 66–68; Tessa Rajak, “The *Against Apion* and the Continuities in Josephus’s Political Thought,” in *Understanding Josephus: Seven Perspectives* (ed. Steve Mason; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1998), 224.

Jews, however, offers a distinct shift in tone as Josephus constantly references the forgotten Jewish religious liberties.¹⁹⁰

This shift seems to indicate not only a change in content but, more importantly, an alteration in the environment of the Jewish people. As Shirley Case reasons, “The change of tone and difference of emphasis in the discussion of certain topics in the *Antiquities*, as compared with the *War*, clearly indicate that the Jews were much less at ease in the time of Domitian than even in the early years immediately following their subjugation by Titus.”¹⁹¹ A ‘hidden transcript’ in the *Antiquities of the Jews* surfaces in three key differences with *Jewish War*: [1] Ironic Discrepancies; [2] Ironic Omissions; and [3] Ironic Additions.

When *Jewish War* and the *Antiquities of the Jews* are compared, ironic discrepancies emerge in key events. For instance, Josephus goes to great lengths in *J.W.* to demonstrate that Titus did not want to destroy the temple in 70 CE.¹⁹² In Josephus’s account, Titus called together some of his trusted officials to decide “what should be done about the holy house” (6.238). After listening to their opinions (6.239–240), Titus came to this conclusion:

“Although the Jews should get upon that holy house, and fight us thence, yet ought we not to revenge ourselves on things that are inanimate, instead of the men themselves;” and that he was not in any case for burning down so vast a work as that was, because this would be a mischief to the Romans themselves, as it would be an ornament to their government while it continued (6.241).

So Titus commanded the cohorts to “make their way through the ruins, and quench the fire” (6.243). Threatening the success of the Roman army (6.244–248), Titus refused to give in to the temptation to destroy the temple with fire and instead chose to “storm the temple” with his whole army (6.249). Nevertheless, the temple was still set on fire.

Josephus blames every possible agent for the fire except Titus: a wayward soldier (6.251–252), the Jews themselves (6.251), and even God (6.250). In an effort to completely absolve Titus of the fire whatsoever, Josephus portrays Titus strenuously attempting to stop the already raging inferno:

190 Case, “Josephus,” 13. For evidence of Domitianic disfavor toward Josephus, see Edmondson, “Introduction,” 18.

191 Case, “Josephus,” 13. See also Mason, “Audience,” 78; Schwartz, *Josephus*, 17; Cohen, *Josephus*, 236.

192 Rajak, *Josephus*, 206 calls this account “the most notable instance of compassion ascribed to Titus.” For further discussion, see Rajak, *Josephus*, 206–213; cf. Mason, “Audience,” 100.

And now a certain person came running to Titus, and told him of this fire, as he was resting himself in his tent after the last battle; whereupon he rose up in great haste and, as he was, ran to the holy house, in order to have a stop put to the fire; after him followed all his commanders, and after them followed the several legions, in great astonishment . . . Then did Caesar, both by calling to the soldiers that were fighting, with a loud voice, and by giving a signal to them with his right hand, order them to quench the fire; but they did not hear what he said, though he spake so loud, having their ears already dinned by a greater noise another way; nor did they attend to the signal he made with his hand neither, as still some of them were distracted with fighting, and others with passion (6.254–257).

Josephus records one last ditch effort to quench the fire after Titus entered the holy place and found it “to be far superior to what the relations of foreigners contained” (6.260). At this point, Titus “came in haste and endeavored to persuade the soldiers to quench the fire, and gave order to Liberalius the centurion, and one of those spearmen that were about him, to beat the soldiers that were refractory with their staves, and to restrain them” (6.262). And yet, because of the zeal of the soldiers and “their hatred of the Jews” (6.263), the fire began to engulf the entire temple. Josephus emphatically ends the account with, “And thus the holy house burnt down, *without Caesar’s approbation*.”¹⁹³

Therefore, in *J.W.*, Josephus painstakingly depicts Titus as the failed hero who tenaciously fought to save the temple of Yahweh from conflagration. It is quite peculiar, then, when Josephus, in an unapologetic and flippant manner, records in the *Ant.* 20.250: “Accordingly the number of the high priests, from the days of Herod until the day when *Titus took the temple and the city, and burnt them*, were in all twenty-eight.”¹⁹⁴ Regardless of whether Titus actually

193 *J.W.* 6.266 [*emphasis added*].

194 *Emphasis added*. Rives, “Flavian,” 147, records three other sources that attest to Titus burning the temple: “[1] Dio, in his very different version of these events, which unfortunately survives only in Byzantine epitomes (66.62–3), simply describes the Romans storming the Temple and says that when the soldiers hung back because of superstitious fear, Titus forced them on . . . [2] there are two accounts from Latin Christian writers of the early fifth century CE. Sulpicius Severus says that Titus summoned a council and considered whether or not to destroy the Temple; some argued there was no need, but others, including Titus himself, thought that it ought to be destroyed so that the *religio* of the Jews and the Christians could be more fully wiped out (*Chron.* 2.30.6–7) . . . [3] Orosius reports that after the Temple had been taken, Titus deliberated whether to burn it or preserve it as a monument to his victory. But since the Church was already spreading throughout all

attempted to stop the fire or not,¹⁹⁵ the *Antiquities of the Jews* (written under Domitian), refuses to offer any pardon, and in direct contradiction to *J.W.*, implicates Titus in the burning of the temple and the city of Jerusalem. The Roman ruler does not appear benevolent to the Jewish people at all; instead, he is the direct perpetrator of the temple's devastation. Such a shift does not indicate new historical information at Josephus's disposal, but supports a significant alteration in the relationship between Josephus and the Flavian dynasty under Domitian.¹⁹⁶

Similarly, Josephus seems to utilize 'hidden transcripts' by ironically omitting details and events from *Ant.* that prove quite significant in *J.W.* For instance, in *J.W.*, a central symbol of Jewish loyalty to Rome is the temple sacrifices for the wellbeing of the emperor. In *J.W.* 2.197–198, Petronius declares to the Jewish people Caligula's decision to erect an imperial statue in the temple in Jerusalem. The Jews naturally protest:

Petronius then quieted them, and said to them, "Will you then make war against Caesar?" The Jews said, "We offer sacrifices twice every day for Caesar, and for the Roman people;" but that if he would place the images among them, he must first sacrifice the whole Jewish nation; and that they were ready to expose themselves, together with their children and wives, to be slain.

The sacrifices for Caesar's wellbeing, then, are evidence of Jewish fidelity to the Roman Empire. Likewise, in *J.W.* 2.409, Josephus identifies the "true beginning of our war with the Romans" as the cessation of the sacrifices for the emperor. Comparable with other acts of "treachery" like killing Roman soldiers (2.408),

the world, it was God's will that the now useless Temple be destroyed, and so Titus did (7.9.5–6)." See also *b. Git.* 56b.

195 Rives, "Flavian," 147–148, however, accurately states, "Josephus was thus apparently alone in his insistence on Titus' attempts to preserve the Temple. Moreover, his account of the destruction contains discrepancies that confirm the assumption that he deliberately shaped his account."

196 Mason, "Flavius," 571 and Case, "Josephus," 15 also point out the discrepancy between *J.W.* and the *Ant.* in regards to the depiction of Herod. In particular, they describe the praise of Herod's building programs in *J.W.* (1.407, 422–428) and the condemnation of his building programs in *Ant.* (15.328–330, 363–365); the grandeur of Caesar and Roma statues described in *J.W.* (1.414) and the negligence of the statues in the same account in *Ant.* (15.339); and the benevolent act of introducing Roman games in Judea in *J.W.* (1.415–416) and the same performances as violations of the Jewish religion that even lead to an assassination attempt in *Ant.* (15.288).

the eradication of the sacrifices for the emperor was opposed by “high priests and principal men” (2.410)¹⁹⁷ because of its symbolic potency.

It is telling, then, that Josephus does not describe the Jewish sacrifices for the wellbeing of the emperor in *Ant.* at all. In fact, *Ant.* 16.157–158 seems to emphasize a different trajectory altogether.¹⁹⁸ Just before this text, Josephus describes the institution of the Olympic games by Herod, which involved, among other things, imperial sacrifices (16.148–149). Then, Josephus criticizes Herod for [1] severe punishments (16.151) and [2] his self-aggrandizement in his demands for honor (16.156), including honorable actions paid to Caesar himself (16.157). In response, Josephus states, “But now the Jewish nation is by their law a stranger to all such things, and accustomed to prefer righteousness to glory; for which reason that nation was not agreeable to him, because it was out of their power to *flatter the king’s ambition with statues or temples, or any other such performances . . .*”¹⁹⁹ Without any clarification for ways in which the Jewish people honor and show loyalty to the empire, Josephus ends his account of “Herod’s crimes as to his own courtiers and counsellors, and of his benefactions as to foreigners and those that had no relation to him” (16.159).

This ironic omission indicates a shift between *J.W.* and *Ant.* In *J.W.* Josephus goes out of his way to highlight the Jewish people’s loyalty to Rome through sacrifices for the wellbeing of the emperor. Yet, *Ant.* is oddly silent on this issue, if not offering trajectories to the contrary. This indicates not just a shift in Josephus’s content but a shift in the Jewish/Roman relationship under the reign of Domitian.

Finally, Josephus includes ironic additions in *Ant.* that are either not found in *J.W.* or drastically enhanced. For example, Shirley Case points out that imperial decrees are a “new feature in the *Antiquities*” that do not appear in *J.W.*²⁰⁰ Although several decrees surface throughout *Ant.*,²⁰¹ none display a ‘hidden transcript’ more plainly than an edict issued by Caesar Augustus, “inscribed upon a pillar in the temple of Caesar” (16.165) and in favor of the Jews poorly treated in the cities of Asia (16.160–161):

Caesar Augustus, high priest and tribune of the people, ordains thus:—
Since the nation of the Jews have been found grateful to the Roman people, not only at this time but in times past also, and chiefly Hyrcanus the

197 See also *J.W.* 2.413–415.

198 Rajak, “Political Thought,” 239.

199 Josephus, *Ant.* 16.158 [*emphasis added*].

200 Case, “Josephus,” 10–20.

201 *Ant.* 19.281–285, 287–291, 303–311.

high priest, under my father, Caesar the emperor, it seemed good to me and my counsellors, according to the sentence and oath of the people of Rome, that the Jews have liberty to make use of their own customs, according to the law of their forefathers, as they made use of them under Hyrcanus, the high priest of Almighty God; and that their sacred money be not touched, but be sent to Jerusalem, and that it be committed to the care of the receivers at Jerusalem. . . . but if any be caught stealing their holy books, or their sacred money, whether it be out of the synagogue or public school, he shall be deemed a sacrilegious person, and his goods shall be brought into the public treasury of the Romans. . . . And if anyone transgress any part of what is above decreed, he shall be severely punished. (16.162–165)

This decree offers a potent critique of the Anti-Jewish actions of Domitian contemporary with the text's composition. The decree begins with Augustus musing over the positive affections between the Roman people and the nation of the Jews (16.162). This forms the foundation for Augustus's declaration that the Jews should not be persecuted for their customs (16.163). Augustus continues and specifically demands the protection of the Jewish "sacred money" that was sent to Jerusalem (16.163).²⁰² He mandates that the punishment for violating this prohibition is to identify the person accurately as "sacrilegious" and to strip them of their goods (16.164). Ironically, the "sacred money" was rerouted after 70 CE to the temple of Jupiter through the *fiscus Iudaicus*, which Domitian collected with egregious rigor (see discussion above).

The fact that Josephus puts this decree in the mouth of Caesar Augustus should not be easily overlooked—for the sovereignty of Augustus far outweighs the claims of Domitian. Indeed, Josephus seems to use this decree, and others, as a threat aimed at Domitian. The peril announced by Augustus at the end of the decree rings especially potent: "And if anyone transgress any part of what is above decreed, he shall be severely punished" (16.165). The decree, only found in *Ant.*, functions as a 'hidden transcript' in which Josephus records history in the past in order to dialogue with the present Anti-Jewish intensification under Domitian.²⁰³

202 See also *Ant.* 14.216; 16.166, 167–168, 171.

203 Similarly, Case, "Josephus," 17–19 and James S. McLaren, "Jews and the Imperial Cult: From Augustus to Domitian," *JSNT* 27.3 (2005): 263–271 point out the ironic addition of Gaius Caligula in the *Ant.* compared to the brief treatment of the emperor in *J.W.* In particular, *J.W.* 2.184–203 gives a cursory account of the attempt by Caligula to put a statue of himself in the temple in Jerusalem (ca. 40 CE). As Case, "Josephus," 18, indicates, "the story

In sum, Josephus in *J.W.* displays a significantly different tone than what is found in *Ant.* This shift indicates a change in the social situation of the Jewish people under Domitian.²⁰⁴ The presence of 'hidden transcripts' in the rhetorical ironies above²⁰⁵ suggests an attempt by Josephus to critique the present situation under Domitian while ostensibly discussing events from the past.²⁰⁶ Thus, the Anti-Jewish Writings *for* Domitian and Jewish

was told without drawing there from any notable lessons to warn rulers against a similar procedure, except that the violent death of Gaius would teach sobriety to his successor [*War*, 11, 208].” In *Ant.* 18.257–308; 19.1–211, however, Josephus articulates the events of Caligula in great detail and length. At the conclusion of this discourse, Josephus, in a strikingly candid manner, states the purpose of this ironic addition, “. . . [Caligula’s] death came very fortunately for the preservation of the laws of all men, and had a great influence upon the public welfare; and this happened most happily for our nation in particular, which had almost utterly perished if he had not been suddenly slain; and I confess I have a mind to give a full account of this matter particularly, because it will afford great assurance of the power of God, and *great comfort to those that are under afflictions, and wise caution to those who think their happiness will never end, nor bring them at length to the most lasting miseries*, if they do not conduct their lives by the principles of virtue” (19.15–16—*emphasis added*). This shift seems to describe, almost too clearly, the situation in which *Ant.* was composed under Domitian—a time of Jewish ‘affliction.’

204 See Mason, “Flavius,” 579–587, for discussion on the ironic critique of Tiberius as a tyrant ruler in Josephus and the parallels between Domitian and Tiberius known in Josephus’s contemporary setting.

205 In addition, Steve Mason, “Figured Speech,” 272 points out the “decidedly anti-monarchical, senatorial aristocracy” that is prominent in *Ant.* In light of the contentious relationship between Domitian and the Roman Senate [So Unknown Author, “Inscription,” 117; Syme, “Antonius,” 12–21; Pleket, “Domitian,” 296–315; Price, *Ritual*, 178], the description in *Ant.* 4.223–224 is startling: “Aristocracy, and the way of living under it, is *the best constitution*; and may you never have any inclination to any other form of government; and may you always love that form, and have the laws for your governors, and govern all your actions according to them; for *you need no supreme governor but God*. But if you shall desire a king, let him be one of your own nation; let him be always careful of justice and other virtues perpetually; let him submit to the laws, and esteem God’s commands to be his highest wisdom; but *let him do nothing without the high priest and the votes of the senators . . .*” (see also Josephus, *Ant.* 6.36; 11.111; 14.91). This depiction of the ‘ideal government’ anachronistically offered by Moses to the Jewish nation (Josephus, *Ant.* 5.15, 43, 44, 135) seems, as in the ironies before, to be more than a mere a discussion of effective politics. Instead, it appears to critique the current governance of Domitian. Indeed, Josephus’s critique of Domitian becomes quite potent when he describes all of the Roman Emperors as “tyrants” in *Ant.* 19.187; 19.230. For critique of Domitian in *J.W.* 7.85–88 through excessive flattery, see Mason, “Audience,” 100.

206 So McLaren, “Jews,” 277–278; Barclay, “Empire,” 330; Martin Percival Charlesworth, “Some Observations on Ruler-Cult Especially in Rome,” *HTR* 28.1 (1935): 40; Mason, “Flavius,”

Writings *under* Domitian both reflect the same intensified Anti-Jewish atmosphere in Domitian's reign.

Policy Shifts Under Nerva

On 18 September, 96 CE, Domitian was assassinated, and Nerva ascended to the throne.²⁰⁷ Immediately, Nerva began to reverse the more abusive actions and policies instituted by Domitian that, according to Dio Cassius, included: accusations of 'maiestas' (68.1.2), reliance on informants for accusations (68.1.2–3), the illegal confiscation of property (68.2.1), and poor financial management (68.2.2–3).

More significantly, Nerva specifically targeted the abuse of the Jewish people under the reign of Domitian. In light of the accusations against Clemens and Domitilla described above,²⁰⁸ Nerva's actions described in Dio Cassius 68.1.2 would have significant implications for the Jewish people: "Nerva also released all who were on trial for maiestas and restored the exiles; moreover, he put to death all the slaves and the freedmen who had conspired against their masters and allowed that class of persons to lodge no complaint whatever against their masters; and no persons were permitted to accuse anybody of maiestas or *of adopting the Jewish mode of life*."²⁰⁹ This description, in the context of many other abuses, indicates that under the reign of Domitian the Anti-Jewish element played a significant role, something Nerva would not replicate.

Furthermore, Nerva issued a unique coin (shown below) between November 96 CE and the summer of 97 CE.²¹⁰ The obverse pictures Nerva crowned with laurel, similar to Vespasian's coin above. On the reverse, the Jewish date palm symbol, which stood in between the Jewish subjects on Vespasian's coin, dominates the center of the coin. Significantly, the caption around the coin's reverse reads: FISCI IUDAICI CALUMNIA SUBLATA, which translates as "the malicious accusation of the treasury for the Jewish tax has been removed."²¹¹ Martin Goodman notes the significance of this caption:

589; Haaland, "Josephus," 308; Case, "Josephus," 20; Rajak, *Jewish*, 307, 325–329, 331; cf. Schwartz, *Josephus*, 18 (n. 69).

207 Suet., *Dom.* 16–17; Dio Cass. 68.1.2. See Jones, *Domitian*, 193.

208 Dio Cass. 67.14.1–3.

209 68.1.2 (Cary, LCL) [*emphasis added*]. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 20.10–11 suggests that it was at this point that the apostle John returned from exile on the island of Patmos (cf. *Hist. eccl.* 3.18.1).

210 D.C.A. Shotter, "The Principate of Nerva—Some Observations on the Coin Evidence," *Historia* 32 (1983): 218.

211 Goodman, "Gentile Attitudes," 169.



FIGURE 5.2 96–97 CE. Dedicated to Nerva announcing the removal of the *fiscus Iudaicus*.

NERVA: RIC 58. IMAGE USED WITH PERMISSION OF CLASSICAL NUMISMATIC GROUP, INC. (<WWW.CNGCOINS.COM>).

The term *sublata* is otherwise unattested on Roman coins, and, although it was not uncommon to advertise remission of taxes, an abusive term (*calumnia*) in reference either to the treasury responsible for taxes, or to those who brought accusations to the treasury, or to the whole notion of the tax, is extraordinary, and perhaps only possible when a new emperor wished to make an exceptionally strong statement of disassociation from the previous regime.²¹²

The Anti-Jewish atmosphere under Domitian escalated to such an extent that Nerva's initial policy changes, celebrated in the propaganda of imperial coinage, highlighted the shift in the treatment of the Jewish people. Such evidence corroborates the conclusion that, although there was an Anti-Jewish precedent in the Flavian dynasty, the Anti-Jewish environment was intensified during the reign of Domitian.

²¹² Goodman, "Gentile Attitudes," 176. See also Keresztes, "Jews," 6. Thompson, "Sociological," 161, aware of the significance of this point, avoids the apparent conclusion about Nerva's reign by, irresponsibly, stating: "Nerva, who followed Domitian, may have been more lenient towards the Jews; the reverse side of a coin from his reign reads: 'fisci Iudaici calumnia sublata' . . . But the exact social context for this legend is not known; it may not be related at all to a change of policy between Domitian and Nerva."

The Lack of Distinction between Jews and Christians in Domitian's Reign

So how does an intensified Anti-Jewish environment impact the inquiry into Christian persecution (physical and non-physical) under the reign of Domitian? This inquiry is addressed by answering a different question: Did the Romans see a clear distinction between the Jews and the Christians?²¹³ If so, then the Anti-Jewish sentiment of the Flavian dynasty would have little effect on the Christian community. If not, then the intensified Anti-Jewish environment under Domitian drastically increases the possibility of physical and non-physical persecution of Christians.

Traditionally, historians have assumed that following the events of 70 CE the Jewish and Christian communities emerged on the imperial scene as separate and unique groups.²¹⁴ As Samuel A.B. Mercer states at the beginning of the twentieth century, "It is as nearly certain as very many historical facts of distant time can be, that since Nero's day intelligent Romans had been able to distinguish Christians as a sect, Jewish indeed in origin, but separated from Judaism."²¹⁵ Or more recently, Savas Agourides remarks:

... after the destruction of Jerusalem, this kind of control was over and the severance of Christianity from Judaism was complete, so that the Christians appeared to the Roman government as an independent body, in which perhaps there was a greater inherent political threat than in the stubborn Jewish fanaticism.²¹⁶

This conclusion, however, is challenged by four observations: [1] the re-categorization of the Jewish people after 70 CE; [2] the Christian practice of

213 This question should be distinguished from similar queries like: 'Is Christianity distinct from Judaism at the end of the first century?' or 'Did Christians view themselves as completely separate from Jews?' While related, neither of these questions address the query of this chapter: 'How were these subject groups viewed by the Roman sovereign elites?'

214 Paula Fredriksen, "What 'Parting of the Ways?': Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City," in *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (eds. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed; Tübingen: Mohr, 2007), 16 also suggests the options of: 28–30 CE; ca. 50 CE; and even 135 CE. Fredriksen's ultimate conclusion is posed in the question in her closing line, "What Parting of the Ways?" (p. 63). For more discussion, see Collins, *Crisis*, 75–76.

215 Mercer and Leicester, "Alleged," 26.

216 Agourides, "Character," 133.

Jewish customs; [3] Christian identity rooted in Jewish scriptures; and [4] Roman unfamiliarity with Christians in the second century CE.

The Re-Categorization of the Jewish People

The events and actions surrounding 70 CE display an intentional effort by the Flavian dynasty to completely assimilate the Jewish people into the Roman Empire.²¹⁷ As discussed above, the destruction of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and the implementation of the *fiscus Iudaicus* carried significant symbolic and practical implications: Yahweh had been subjugated to Jupiter, and therefore, the Jews should switch their complete allegiance to Rome.²¹⁸

Joseph Rives argues persuasively that the complete destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem by the Flavians,²¹⁹ and actions thereafter,²²⁰ indicates their intentions to not merely quell future revolts but, more significantly, “to eliminate the anomalous cult organization that made the Jews throughout the Roman world into a people with an alternative focus of loyalty and national identity.”²²¹ Rives argues that the key point of contention was the Jews were not just a geographically located cult like Artemis of the Ephesians. Instead, Judaism was vigorously practiced by “Jews all over the empire,” as is evidenced in their participation in the Jewish festivals as well as the Jewish temple tax.²²² Rives articulates the threat of such a cultic structure:

From Vespasian’s point of view, this anomalous organization would have made the Jews to some extent a shadow *civitas*, a people who identified themselves primarily not with the city in which they lived nor even with Rome, but with Jerusalem and its cult. Jerusalem would thus have appeared as a kind of rival to Rome, the only other city whose ‘citizens’, so to speak, were scattered through the empire.²²³

This cultic structure, then, offered a national allegiance for the Jewish people that significantly hindered their assimilation into the Roman Empire.

²¹⁷ See Michael Grant, *History of Rome* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1978).

²¹⁸ Cf. Tac., *Hist.* 5.13.

²¹⁹ Josephus, *J.W.* 7.1–2.

²²⁰ Ibid., 7.144. See also Goodman, *Ruling*, 234–239.

²²¹ Rives, “Flavian,” 164.

²²² Rives, “Flavian,” 162.

²²³ Ibid., 163. As further evidence, Rives cites Agrippa I’s letter to Gaius in Philo, *Leg.* 281, “[Jerusalem] is the capital not of the single country of Judaea but also of most other countries, because of the colonies which it has sent out.”

Consequently, the Flavian dynasty took distinct measures to eradicate this cultic center so that “in the eyes of ordinary pagans, such actions were most naturally interpreted as the end of worship of the Jewish God.”²²⁴ In particular, following the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, Vespasian mandated the destruction of the Jewish temple in Leontopolis as well.²²⁵ As Shirley Case notes, “To be sure, they destroyed the temple in Leontopolis, in order that no focal point for the cultivation of national sentiment might remain.”²²⁶ In other words, the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem was meant to remove all obstacles for Jews to assimilate into the Roman Empire, and the existence of another temple offered a relocation of the cultic center, thereby perpetuating the Jewish national identity.

Furthermore, the implementation of the *fiscus Iudaicus* offers a similar trajectory. With the redirection of the Jewish tax from the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem to the temple of Jupiter in Rome, the Flavians intended to integrate the Jewish nation into the Roman Empire by directly connecting their allegiance to Jupiter in their annual payments. The tax functioned as a guide for the Jewish people along the path to their new identity found in the chief god of the Romans.²²⁷

These actions, and others like them, imply that, from the Flavian perspective, the Jewish national identity had been eliminated. This result demanded a re-categorization of the Jewish people as a whole.²²⁸ “From the moment that the Temple was destroyed,” Jonathan Edmondson concludes, “Jerusalem and, more broadly, Judaea lost their defining centrality to Judaism. Henceforth, Judaism would become by definition a diasporic cult, as was that other cult that derived from it, Christianity.”²²⁹ This re-categorization of the Jewish people contributed to a lack of clear distinction between the Jews and the Christians from the perspective of the Romans.²³⁰

224 Goodman, “Gentile Attitudes,” 170.

225 Josephus, *J.W.* 7.420–425.

226 Case, “Josephus,” 12.

227 Daniel Schwartz, “Herodians and ‘Ioudaioi’ in Flavian Rome,” in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (eds. Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James Rives; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 63–78 argues further that Herod Agrippa II, despite his significant role in the victory in 70 CE, is not appointed the “client king of Judea” because in the eyes of the Flavians Judea (i.e., the ‘old kingdom’ of the Jews) no longer existed.

228 So Theodor Mommsen, *Der Religionsfrevler nach römischem Recht* (Leipzig: R. Oldenbourg, 1890), 424f.

229 Edmondson, “Introduction,” 24.

230 As Edmondson, “Introduction,” 20, notes, “With the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem . . . ‘Jews’ and ‘Christians’ now became widely scattered, diasporic communities, defined by religion rather than by place of residence.”

The Christian Practice of Jewish Customs

As late as Tertullian in the early third century, Christians were still accused of hiding “under the shadow” of the Jewish religion.²³¹ Such accusations grew out of the various similarities between Christians and Jews in their customs and choices of daily living. For example, the Christians, like the Jews, practiced monotheism,²³² even worshiping the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Moses.²³³ The Christians, like the Jews, rejected idolatry.²³⁴ The Christians, like the Jews, celebrated religious festivals.²³⁵ Indeed, as early as Ignatius (early 2nd century CE)²³⁶ and as late as Origen (3rd century CE),²³⁷ Christian leaders were concerned with the common lay practice of Jewish customs.

In particular, the Jewish practices of the Sabbath, circumcision, and dietary restrictions were widely acknowledged as key demarcations of the Jewish people.²³⁸ Yet, Christians also practiced these customs throughout the first few centuries.²³⁹ From the Roman perspective, such overlap would significantly distort Christian and Jewish distinctions.

Similarly, consistent Christian attendance at Jewish synagogues further blurred the lines.²⁴⁰ In fact, Margaret H. Williams points out that

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- 231 Tertullian, *Apol.* 21.1. H.T. Tzschirner, “Why have the Greek and Roman Writers so Rarely alluded to Christianity?,” *JSL* 3.6 (1853): 270.
- 232 Mark 12:28–34; 1 Cor 8:4–6. See also Kraybill, *Imperial*, 167.
- 233 Matt 22:32; John 8:33ff.; Acts 3:13; 7:32; Rom 4:1ff.; Gal 3:1ff.; Jas 2:21–23. See also Rajak, *Jewish*, 522.
- 234 1 Cor 10:7, 14; 12:2; Gal 5:20; Col 3:5; Rev 21:8; 22:15; *Did.* 3.4; 5.1. See also Kraybill, *Imperial*, 167.
- 235 Melito of Sardis, *Peri Pascha* (mid 2nd century CE); cf. Col 2:16; Gal 4:10. For more discussion, see Judith M. Lieu, *Image and Reality: The Jews in the World of the Christians in the Second Century* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 222; Rajak, “Jewish Community,” 19.
- 236 Ign. *Magn.* 8.1; 10.1; Ign. *Phld.* 6.1. For discussion, see Thompson, *Imperial*, 126–127; Lieu, *Image*, 40, 45; idem, “History and Theology in Christian Views of Judaism,” in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (eds. Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak; London: Routledge, 1992), 92–94). See also Justin, *Dial.* 47.
- 237 For discussion, see Lieu, “History,” 88–89. Lieu, *Image*, 24 also mentions John Chrysostom (4th century CE).
- 238 Justin *Dial.* 8.4; 46.2. Juvenal, *Sat.* 14.96–99 mentions monotheism, dietary restrictions, and circumcision as key indicators of Jewish living (cf. Persius, *Sat.* 5.184). Among others, Rajak, “Jewish Community,” 17 lists: Philo, *Somn.* 2.123–129; *Legat.* 23.158; Josephus, *Ant.* 16.27. For more discussion, see Lieu, *Image*, 34, 116, 170; Rajak, *Jewish*, 362; idem, “Jewish Community,” 13, 17–18.
- 239 For Sabbath, see: Ign. *Magn.* 9.1; Origen, *Hom. Jer.* 12.13. For circumcision, see: Acts 10:45; 11:2; 16:3; Phil 3:5; Col 2:11 (cf. Rom 2:28–29; 1 Cor 7:18–19; Gal 2:3). For dietary restrictions, see: Rom 14:21; 1 Cor 8:13ff.; Rev 2:14, 20 (cf. Mark 7:1–23; 1 Cor 10:25); Origen, *Hom. Lev.* 10.2.
- 240 Acts 9:20; 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:2, 10, 17; 18:4, 19, 26; 19:8; Origen, *Hom. Lev.* 5.8; cf. Matt 4:23; 9:35; 12:9; 13:54; Mark 1:21–29, 39; 3:1; 6:2; Luke 4:15–28, 44; 6:6; 13:10; John 6:59; 18:20. Regarding

even the organizational structure of the Christian churches reflected the Jewish synagogues, with the churches “apparently still called a synagogue” in the second century.²⁴¹ J. Nelson Kraybill adds that, at times, “prominent leaders” in the Christian community like Paul (Acts 7:54–8:3; 9:1–2) and Crispus (Acts 18:8; cf. 1 Cor 1:14) “once played influential roles in the Jewish community.”²⁴² From Rome’s perspective, then, the difference between Jews and Christians was increasingly convoluted. In addition to the lack of a Jewish cultic center, Christians practiced distinctly Jewish customs.²⁴³

Christian Identity Rooted in Jewish Scriptures

From its inception, the Christian community claimed Jewish scriptures as its own.²⁴⁴ These Hebrew texts were the battle grounds for issues regarding Jesus’ identity as well as their own. As Judith M. Lieu states, “. . . in sharp opposition to their pagan contemporaries, [Christians and Jews] shared, often, as we have suggested for Justin [Martyr], literally, the same text and the same exegetical principles, yet this became their most flexible weapon in denying each other’s world.”²⁴⁵ Indeed, based on Old Testament texts, the Christian community envisioned itself as the ‘True People of God’ continuing the task of Yahweh in Christ.²⁴⁶

In Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* (mid-2nd century CE), the identity of the Christian community is a central point of contention. In blatant conflict with Jewish claims, Justin responds, “For the true spiritual Israel, and descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham . . . are we who have been led

Melito of Sardis’s *Peri Pascha*, Rajak, *Jewish*, 448–449 remarks, “. . . the contemporary information to be gleaned from the poem is essentially no more than that the synagogue still held a powerful attraction for the Christians of his day, causing considerable anxiety to the local leaders of the church.” For the significance of synagogues for diasporic Jews, see Rajak, “Jewish Community,” 10–12.

241 Williams, “Domitian,” 201. Cf. Jas 2:2. Although the exact identity of James’s audience is debated (e.g., Christians in general, Jewish Christians, Jewish communities, etc.), the significant point for the study at hand is that a Christian leader (Jas 1:1; Acts 15:13–21) uses Jewish grammar in a document canonized by the Christian community.

242 Kraybill, *Imperial*, 169.

243 See Acts 18:12–16.

244 So Matt 1:22–23; 2:15, 17–18; 4:13–16; Luke 4:16–21; Ign. *Magn.* 8.2; etc.

245 Lieu, *Image*, 279. For discussion on Jewish and Christian hermeneutical methods, see Lieu, *Image*, 128.

246 Rev 1:5 and 1 Pet 2:9–10 apply titles that fulfill Old Testament promises to the nation of Israel (Exod 19:3–6) to the Christian community. Cf. Phil 3:13; Jas 1:1; Gal 6:16; Rev 7:1–8.

to God through this crucified Christ . . .”²⁴⁷ This redefinition of the title ‘Israel,’ now applied to Christians, parallels Revelation 2:9 and 3:9. Both texts utilize the same phrase to encourage the Christian communities: “the ones claiming to be Jews themselves yet they are not.” Commenting on these two texts in Revelation, Adela Yarbro Collins aptly concludes: “. . . the remarks imply that John was not content to find a new name to express his own self-understanding and that of his community of faith, but that he claimed the name Ἰουδαῖοι.”²⁴⁸ Thus, at the exact same time, both groups attempt to occupy the same ideological space: the true followers of Yahweh.

From the perspective of the Jewish and Christian communities, their concurrent claims to be ‘the true followers of Yahweh’ were from the same text and yet quite distinct. From the sovereign perspective, however, the nuances are concealed, as Gallio determined, in “questions about words and names and *your law*” (Acts 18:15). This textual and linguistic overlap, then, naturally contributed to a situation in which the Roman Empire conflated the two groups into one.

Roman Unfamiliarity with Christians in the Second Century CE

The number of Roman writers leading up to and contemporary with Trajan’s reign (98–117 CE) who do not mention Christians in their text is notable.²⁴⁹ What is more striking is the significant lack of familiarity by those authors who do mention Christians in the second century CE.²⁵⁰ Pliny the Younger’s *Ep.* 10.96 offers a telling example.

247 Justin, *Dial.* 11 (Donaldson). Cf. Gal 3:7, 27–29; Romans 2:18–19; 9:6–7a; Origen, *Cels.* 2.8. See also Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 73; Lieu, “History,” 83.

248 Collins, “Persecution,” 739–740. See also Collins, *Crisis*, 75, 85–86; Slater, “Social,” 251; Thompson, *Revelation*, 138; Rajak, “Jewish Community,” 21. For the evolution of this linguistic category in the late 2nd–early 3rd century CE, see Steve Mason, *Josephus, Judea, and Christian Origins: Methods and Categories* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009), 141–165 (esp. 155–156).

249 Authors that do not mention Christians: Lucan (*ca.* 65), Quintilian (*ca.* 100), Silius Italicus (*ca.* 103), Martial (*ca.* 104), Juvenal (late first to early second century CE), Florus (*ca.* end of Trajan’s reign to Hadrian), and Plutarch (*ca.* 120). Nevertheless, at least Quintilian, Martial, Juvenal, and Plutarch show knowledge of the Jews in their writings.

250 Both Suetonius and Tacitus, writing in the second century, mention Christians as well as Jews. Suet., *Claud.* 25.4 seems to misspell ‘Christos’ when he writes, “Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome” (Rolfe, LCL). As Williams, “Domitian,” 199, suggests, “[Suetonius] is surely just writing with his invariable common sense and customary knowledgeability about things Jewish.”

Born in 61 CE, Pliny the Younger spent the majority of his adolescence under the Flavian dynasty. In the reign of Domitian, Pliny saw his political career accelerate to new heights, from his election to Quaestor in 89 CE to Tribune of the People in 91 CE,²⁵¹ positions which offered, at times, close company to the emperor himself. In 110–112 CE, Pliny is appointed governor of Bithynia and empowered by Trajan to address some troubling issues in the region. Given his political background, Pliny's perspective on Christians is highly valued in that his knowledge of the Jewish sect would reflect the understanding by the Roman elite at the time of Domitian as well as the time of Trajan.

In the opening lines, Pliny states that the occasion of his letter is due to his own 'ignorance' and need for clarification from Trajan. Pliny writes, "Having never been present at any trials concerning those who profess Christianity, I am unacquainted *not only with the nature of their crimes*, or the measure of their punishment, but how far it is proper to enter into an examination concerning them."²⁵² In what follows, Pliny requests help concerning two key problems: [1] how to properly implement trials for Christians and [2] which Christian beliefs merit punishment.

Pliny details the trials he conducted concerning "those who have been brought before [him] as Christians." At the time of interrogation, those who confessed to being a Christian were threatened with physical punishment and offered the opportunity to repent up to three times, at which point, if they refused, Pliny executed them. Once again, Pliny indicates his lack of awareness regarding the Christian beliefs: "For I had no doubt that, *whatever the nature of their creed* might be, a contumacious and inflexible obstinacy certainly deserved to be punished."²⁵³ During the trials, those who denounced being a Christian were forced to prove their allegiance to Rome through three actions, after which they were set free: [1] invoke the gods; [2] offer prayer, incense, and wine to an imperial cult statue of Trajan; and [3] curse Christ. The explanation for these three elements indicates, once again, Pliny's lack of familiarity with

Writing in the second century as well, Tac., *Ann.* 15.44, on the other hand, offers a more accurate depiction of Jesus, although referring to him as 'Christus' as if it is his proper name. Yet, he still seems to depict the Christians in the same language used in Tac., *Hist.* 5.5 in his description of the Jewish people.

251 For a summary of Pliny's career under Domitian, see Henry F. Pelham, "The Younger Pliny," *The FNR* 27.158 (1880): 227–248.

252 Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96 (*emphasis added*). All Pliny the Younger quotes that follow are from *Letters by Pliny the Younger* (trans. William Melmoth; 9 vols.; The Harvard Classics; New York: Collier & Son, 1909–1914) unless otherwise noted.

253 *Emphasis added*.

Christians: “none of which those who are really Christians, *it is said*, can be forced to do.”²⁵⁴

Subsequently, Pliny begins to describe some of the Christian beliefs and practices disclosed during his forceful interrogation:

They affirmed the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they met on a stated day before it was light, and addressed a form of prayer to Christ, as to a divinity, binding themselves by a solemn oath, not for the purposes of any wicked design, but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble, to eat in common a harmless meal. From this custom, however, they desisted after the publication of my edict, by which, according to your commands, I forbade the meeting of any assemblies.

Instead of clarity, the Christian confessions only provided greater confusion for Pliny, “After receiving this account, I judged it so much the more necessary to endeavour to extort the real truth, by putting two female slaves to the torture, who were said to officiate in their religious rites: but all I could discover was evidence of an absurd and extravagant superstition.” Regardless of his tactics, Pliny is unable to clarify the Christian beliefs, although he is convinced they deserve some sort of punishment.

Curiously, when Trajan’s response is examined, only one of Pliny’s inquiries is addressed—the proper procedure for Christian trials:

You observed proper procedure, my dearest Secundus, in investigating the charges against the Christians who were brought before you. It is not possible to lay down any general rule for all such cases. Do not go out of your way to look for them. If indeed they should be brought before you, and the crime is proved, they must be punished; with the restriction, however, that where the party denies he is a Christian, and shall make it evident that he is not, by invoking our gods, let him (notwithstanding any former suspicion) be pardoned upon his repentance. Anonymous informations ought not to be received in any sort of prosecution. It is introducing a very dangerous precedent, and is quite foreign to the spirit of our age.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ *Emphasis added.* In response to the question, ‘Where did Pliny learn such a procedure?’, Charlesworth, “Observations,” 32 and Keresztes, “Jews,” 22 conclude that it was from his political experience under Domitian (about twenty years earlier).

²⁵⁵ Pliny, *Ep.* 10.97 [*emphasis added*].

Through all of the praise and instruction, Trajan never addresses one of the central, if not primary, issues in Pliny's original letter: the lack of knowledge and clarity about the Christian beliefs which mandate punishment.

Indeed, it is this unfamiliarity that also characterizes the Roman perception of Christians throughout the middle of the second century CE. For example, in Hadrian's letter to Servianus (*ca.* 130), Christians are emphatically described as worshipers of Serapis,²⁵⁶ while Epictetus (*ca.* 130), as recorded by Arrian, seems to confuse Jews and Christians by referring to "one who has been baptized" as "a Jew."²⁵⁷ The inaccuracy of these mid-second century Romans suggests a distinct ignorance in familiarity with Christians as late as the reign of Hadrian.

In sum, these four observations suggest that Christians were not seen as a distinctly separate group from the Jews in the time of Domitian.²⁵⁸ The Roman elite were unfamiliar and unconcerned with the ideological nuances that distinguished these two groups in their respective perceptions. Therefore, the intensification of the Anti-Jewish environment under Domitian's reign not only offers a highly contentious period for the Jewish people but for Christians as well.²⁵⁹ This depiction is congruent with the setting reflected in the text of Revelation: a time period of non-physical persecution that, at times, escalated into physical persecution.²⁶⁰

Conclusion

The book of Revelation does not suggest a socio-historical context in which the Roman Empire is presently implementing 'mass killings' of Christians. The Apocalypse remembers in the indefinite past and anticipates in the indefinite future physical persecutions that lead to death. Yet, Revelation reflects a

256 Flavius Vopiscus, *Life of Saturninus* 7, 8.

257 *The Discourses of Epictetus* 2.9, quoted in Tzschirner, "Greek," 263.

258 Lieu, *Image*, 8–9, 144, 155, 157, 161–162; Collins, *Crisis*, 75–76; Lieu, "History," 87; Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 6, 47–48, 130; Schwartz, *Josephus*, 4; Rowland, *Heaven*, 409; cf. Boyarin, *Border*, xi, 1–2, 6–7, 11–12.

259 Fiorenza, *Justice*, 194.

260 *N.B.*: This chapter has not relied on the, sometimes exaggerated, claims of Christian writers from the end of the first century to the fourth century CE to come to this conclusion. Only at this point, then, is it appropriate to mention that the conclusion stated above is substantiated by the following documents: 1 *Clem.* 1.1; 5.1–2; 7.1–4; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.17–20, 39; 4.18, 24; 5.8, 18; 6.25; 7.25; and Tertullian, *Apol.* 5.4. For 1 Peter see Slater, "Social," 243–244; Hebrews see Aitken, "Reading," 82; Parker, "Domitian," 43; and Luke-Acts see Donald W. Riddle, "First Clement, and the Persecution of Domitian," *JBL* 43.3/4 (1924): 347.

present setting of escalated tension for Christians due to non-physical persecution that has, at times, resulted in physical persecutions of various types—just not ‘mass killings.’

The socio-historical context of Domitian's reign matches this description. The Flavian dynasty's Anti-Jewish ‘foundational myth’ was intensified under Domitian. Since the Roman elite at the end of the first century did not perceive Christians as a distinctly separate group from the Jews, an Anti-Jewish intensification would impact Christian communities as well, offering the exact setting that Revelation demands.

Thus, in contradistinction to the early-date advocates, the socio-historical setting of Domitian's reign confirms the late-date of Revelation (92–96 CE)²⁶¹ and in no way militates against it. This conclusion offers both a date of composition and a context in which ‘points of conversation’ can now be observed within the Apocalypse. Indeed, if Revelation does interact with the empire, it would be natural for key imagery of the Flavian ‘foundational myth’ to emerge in the subject text. Therefore, through this Alter-Imperial lens, Revelation 20:7–10 is examined for ‘points of conversation’ to offer a new perspective on a notoriously difficult text.

261 Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.3.

PART 3

*The Alter-Imperial Paradigm
and the Book of Revelation*



An Alter-Imperial Interpretation of Revelation 20:7–10

Why *must* Satan be released? This question has plagued scholars for centuries, provoking both embellished and anemic expositions. The tension felt in Revelation 20:7–10 arises from Revelation 20:1–3. In this text, an angel from heaven binds “the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan” (20:1–2) and imprisons him in the Abyss for a thousand years (20:3a). And yet, the jubilation from those who heard this message (1:3) is short-lived. The text continues in 20:3b with, “After these things, he *must* be let out for a short time.” It is at this point that the question emerges: Why *must* Satan be released?

In Revelation 20:4–6, the reader’s attention is diverted by a vision of souls of the faithful witnesses reigning with Jesus in heaven and a beatitude for those who overcome.¹ This brief reprieve, however, dissolves in Revelation 20:7: “And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be let out from his prison.” The dramatic tension created by the anticipation of the events that follow once again prompts the question: Why *must* Satan be released?

Inadequate Options: Three Recent Interpretive Approaches

Over the past 125 years, Revelation scholarship has primarily utilized three interpretive approaches to explain the images of the Apocalypse: intertextual explorations, historical inquiries, and sociological investigations.² Regarding Revelation 20:7–10, each approach, however, proves inadequate for different reasons.

First, intertextual explorations provide little interpretative help. Given that the book of Revelation contains over 500 allusions to the Old Testament in 404 verses, it would be safe to assume that the Old Testament offers a cogent

¹ There are seven beatitudes in Revelation (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14).

² As stated in the introduction (p. 2), these three categories are not mutually exclusive. Often interpreters will use all three approaches to develop their interpretations. Nevertheless, in order to analyze the typical attempts to solve the problem of the release of Satan, these three categories helpfully organize the interaction with the imagery in Rev 20:1–10.

explanation for the images of Revelation 20:7–10.³ Nevertheless, the Old Testament only establishes some aesthetic symbolic referents, such as: “four corners of the earth,”⁴ “the sand of the sea,”⁵ “fire from heaven,”⁶ and “Gog and Magog.”⁷ While this helps govern some of the images,⁸ the primary image of the passage (the release of Satan) has no Old Testament referent whatsoever.⁹

Second, historical inquiries and sociological investigations are simply disregarded by scholarship in Revelation 20:7–10. Presumably due to the assumption that the ‘release of Satan’ has no analogous equivalent in Roman culture, even the historically focused works of Colin J. Hemer, William M. Ramsay,

- 3 See the appendix of OT allusions in Robert A. Lowery, *Revelation's Rhapsody* (Joplin, Mo.: College, 2006), 175–197.
- 4 Isa 11:12; Jer 49:36; Ezek 7:2. See also Matt 24:31; 1 En. 18:2; 4 Ezra 13:5.
- 5 Gen 22:17; 32:12; 41:49; Josh 11:4; Judg 7:12; 1 Sam 13:5; Job 29:18; Ps 139:18; Jer 15:8; Hab 1:9. See also *Pr. Man.* 1:9; *Jos. Asen.* 1:2; *Gk. Apoc. Ezra* 2:32; 3:2; 1 Macc 11:1.
- 6 2 Kgs 1:9–12; Ezek 38:22; 39:6; Ps 11:4–6. See also *Pss. Sol.* 17:24b; 4 Ezra 13:9b–11; 1 En. 48:8b–10a, 10c.
- 7 Gog = 1 Chr 5:4; Ezek 38–39; Amos 7:1 (LXX). Magog = Gen 10:2; 1 Chr 1:5; Ezek 38–39. See also *Sib. Or.* 3:512; 3 En. 45:5. See Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 515 (n. 54); H.J. Holtzmann, *Briefe und Offenbarung des Johannes* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1893), 356; Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (HNT 16; Tübingen: Mohr, 1970), 163; Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (NTD 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 107; Johannes Weiss, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1904), 103; Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John* (BNTC 19; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006), 286–288; Brian K. Blount, *Revelation* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 369–370; G.B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John* (BNTC 19; London: A&C Black, 1966; repr., Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 256–257; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 373–374; R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 2:187–190.
- 8 Thomas Johann Bauer, *Das tausendjährige Messiasreich der Johannesoffenbarung: Eine literarkritische Studie zu Offb 19,11–21,8* (BZNW 148; Berlin: Gruyter, 2007), 174 mildly observes, “Biblische Zitate sind in 20,1–10 weit seltener als in 19,21.”
- 9 In addition, there are no Old Testament connections to the ‘binding’ and ‘imprisonment’ of Satan. However, in 1 En. 10:4–14 Azaz’el is ‘bound’ and thrown into ‘darkness’ (see also 1 En. 88:1), paralleling Rev 20:1–3 [so David E. Aune, *Revelation* (3 vols.; WBC 52A–52C; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997–1998), 3:1078–1079; Bauer, *Messiasreich*, 186–187; Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 161; Lohse, *Offenbarung*, 105; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation* (AB 38; Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), 330]. Yet, significantly, there is never any ‘release’ (Rev 20:7–10); the actions to Azaz’el are eternal (Cf. 4 Ezra 13:9b–13; Cf. 14:4b–6; T. Levi 17.8–11). As Bauer, *Messiasreich*, 187 concludes, “Für eine zeitlich begrenzte Fesselung eines Widersachers Gottes mit erneuter Loslassung in der Art von Offb 20,1–3.7–10 dagegen finden sich in der jüdischen Apokalyptik keine Parallelen.”

Wes Howard-Brook/Anthony Gwyther, and the sociologically oriented Leonard Thompson disregard historical trajectories for Revelation 20:7–10.¹⁰ The text is simply ignored by these works.¹¹

As a result, study of Revelation 20:7–10 is dominated, for better or worse, by a fourth interpretative approach: theological systems. Although coming to distinctly different conclusions, premillennial and amillennial interpreters attempt to explain the release of Satan by forcing the image into their theological schemas.¹² Premillennials encounter substantial difficulties with the events in Revelation 20:7–10.¹³ Specifically, upon Satan's release, he goes out and deceives the nations from the "four corners of the earth" and gathers them for battle (20:7) against the people of God (20:9). This evil army is as numerous as "the sand of the sea" (20:8), but from where did such a large number of evil come?

At the end of Revelation 19:11–21, the divine warrior casts the beast and false prophet into the lake of fire, which is followed by the complete destruction of rebellious humanity with the divine warrior's sword: "Καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπεκτάνθησαν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ" (19:21).¹⁴ This complete annihilation of evil in Revelation 19:20–21 directly precedes the binding and imprisonment of Satan (20:1–3) and the reign of Christ and his followers (20:4–6) for a thousand years. According to Premillennialism, in this thousand years, the world (20:1–6) enjoys utopian

10 Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (JSNTSup 11; Sheffield: JSOT, 1986; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); William M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904; repr., Grand Rapids: Hendrickson, 2001); Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999); Leonard Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

11 Rev 20:7–10 is mentioned in Hemer, *Letters*, 131, but it is not applied to a historical parallel. Instead, he connects Gog in 20:8 with Ezekiel [see also Hemer, *Letters*, 259 (n. 39); 260 (n. 52)].

12 Postmillennial and Preterist perspectives are not included in the following discussion due to the general lack of attention to (or complete negligence of) the release of Satan by both positions.

13 Premillennials believe the second coming of Christ (Rev 19:11–21) inaugurates a utopian reign on earth (Rev 20:1–6). In this context, 'Premillennials' (or Premillennialism) refers to both Dispensational and Historic Premillennials. Although Historic Premillennials will take issue with this conflation, the difficulties met by an earthly millennial kingdom are shared by both theological systems.

14 Although a premillennial advocate, David J. MacLeod, "The Second 'Last Thing': The Millennial Kingdom of Christ (Rev 20:4–6)," *BSac* 157 (2000): 329 writes, "The text implies that all the armies that followed the beast will be destroyed."

bliss, where the lion rests with the calf and the child plays with the vipers (Isa 11:6–9; 65:17–25): complete peace and unity over all creation.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the idyllic scene is shattered in Revelation 20:7–10 when Satan is released, deceives the nations, and gathers evil humanity, once again, for battle. But if the rebellious nations are completely destroyed in Revelation 19:21, then who does Satan deceive upon his release in Revelation 20:7–8?¹⁶ Premillennials answer this question by suggesting that there will be *some* in the ‘utopian’ millennium who rebel even though Satan is bound,¹⁷ leading to further difficulties for the theological system resulting in odd assertions like the necessity of multiple bodily resurrections separated by the thousand years,¹⁸ the rebellious ‘*some*’ as non-resurrected persons (born?) in the millennium,¹⁹ and other theological alchemy that can only be described as forced conjecture.

Furthermore, amillennial interpretations likewise prove inadequate.²⁰ Generally speaking, amillennials suggest the release of Satan points to a time of increased and widespread persecution of God’s people right before Christ’s final coming and the judgment of the world (Rev 20:11–15).²¹ This interpreta-

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- 15 So John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 293–294, 301; cf. Holtzmann, *Offenbarung*, 355. The Isaiah texts, however, do not parallel Revelation 20:4–6, but instead, Revelation 21–22 in the description of the new heaven and the new earth (e.g., Isa 65:16–18 and Rev 21:1; Isa 65:17, 19–20 and Rev 21:4; Isa 65:16–17 and Rev 21:5; Isa 65:17 and Rev 21:22; Isa 11:6–12 and Rev 21:24–26; Isa 65:22–23 and Rev 22:3; Isa 65:16–17 and Rev 22:6).
 - 16 R. Fowler White, “Reexamining the Evidence for Recapitulation in Rev 20:1–10,” *WTJ* 51.2 (1989): 321. I. Howard Marshall, “The Christian Millennium,” *EvQ* 72.3 (2000): 229 (n. 26) states, “Rev 20:3 seems otiose if there is nobody left for Satan to deceive!” Cf. Merrill Tenney, “The Importance of Exegesis of Revelation 20:1–8,” *BSac* 111 (1954): 144 who simply ignores the destruction of all the nations in Revelation 19 altogether.
 - 17 Walvoord, *Revelation*, 302; Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 90.
 - 18 So Craig Blomberg, “Historic Premillennialism in the Book of Revelation,” in *Dragons, John, and Every Grain of Sand: Essays on the Book of Revelation* (ed. Shane J. Wood; Joplin, Mo.: College, 2011), 153–156; Walvoord, *Revelation*, 298–300.
 - 19 Walvoord, *Revelation*, 302.
 - 20 Amillennials believe the thousand-year reign (Rev 20:1–6) describes the time period between Christ’s first and second comings.
 - 21 G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 989; William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1940; repr., 2004), 193–195; Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: MacMillan, 1906; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 267; Steve Gregg, ed., *Revelation Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 472; M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1989), 208–210; Laurin J. Wenig, *The Challenge of the Apocalypse* (New York: Paulist,

tion suffers, though, with the opening phrase of 20:7a, “And when the thousand years are completed” (Καὶ ὅταν τελεσθῇ τὰ χίλια ἔτη). If, as the amillennials suggest, the thousand years is defined as the Church Age, then the second coming occurs in 20:7a, which would put the release of Satan (20:7b) and the supposed persecution (20:8–9) after the advent. Therefore, any interpretation that suggests a significant persecution by Satan right before the second coming of Christ (based on this passage) must omit the opening phrase of 20:7a, which places the events of Satan’s release *after* the thousand years.

Theological systems, then, struggle to develop a coherent explanation of Revelation 20:1–10. As Christopher Rowland observes, “The problem with the eschatology of Revelation is that we have few parallels from Jewish literature of, what one might term, a two-stage expectation for the future kingdom of God.”²² Without interpretive parallels, conjecture and speculation reign.

Revelation 20:7–10 and Revelation’s Structure

From intertextual explorations to historical inquiries to sociological investigations to theological systems, the interpretative approaches to Revelation 20:7–10 have provided little clarity, causing many to preclude this text from significant scholarly discussion. However, the Apocalypse’s placement of this imagery in the overall narrative demands that this text not be easily set aside due to its enigmatic nature; it is the penultimate moment before Revelation’s zenith (21:1–8). It is a climactic image, not superfluous drivel.

A scholarly consensus of Revelation’s literary structure is quite elusive. Some divide the book broadly into three divisions,²³ while others posit various creative

2002), 107; Darrell W. Johnson, *Discipleship on the Edge: An Expository Journey through the Book of Revelation* (Vancouver: Regent College, 2004), 344; Leon Morris, *Revelation* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 232; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005), 511–513; Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation* (CE 16; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1993), 200–202. Cf. Lohse, *Offenbarung*, 106.

22 Rowland, *Heaven*, 435. Cf. Gehrhard Maier, *Die Johannesoffenbarung und die Kirche* (WUNT 25; Tübingen: Mohr, 1981), 623–624; Bauer, *Messiasreich*, 244–245.

23 Rowland, *Heaven*, 11–12 separates the book into: [1] Rev 1–3; [2] Rev 4–22:5; and [3] Rev 22:6–21. With more sophistication, Martin Karrer, *Die Johannesoffenbarung als Brief: Studien zu ihrem literarischen, historischen und theologischen Ort* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 226–228 also divides Revelation into Rowland’s three parts, but divides Rev 4–22:5 into three further sections due to detectable thematic shifts. The body, however, is not disconnected from Rev 1–3, for as Karrer, *Johannesoffenbarung*, 223 states, “Obwohl also im Corpus der Apk deren Adressaten (gemeinden) nicht mehr

solutions: six divisions of seven,²⁴ seven divisions of seven,²⁵ six sets of six,²⁶ and elaborate chiasmi²⁷—all filled with theories of interludes,²⁸ redaction,²⁹

namentlich erwähnt werden, bleiben sie als ins Auge gefaßte und angesprochene Leser und Hörer präsent.”

- 24 Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse* (Boston: Beacon, 1963; repr., Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 45–49 structures the book: [1] Seven Messages—Rev 1–3 (125 lines in the Greek Bible); [2] Seven Seals—Rev 4–7 (133 lines); [3] Seven Trumpets—8–11:14 (122 lines); [4] Seven Non-Labeled Visions—11:15–14:20 (144 lines); [5] Seven Vials—15–18 (159 lines); and [6] Seven Non-Labeled Visions—19–22 (148 lines). For further discussion (both critique and affirmation), see Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (HDR 9; Missoula: Scholars, 1976; repr., Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 13–19.
- 25 Beale, *Revelation*, 114 favors a sevenfold division ([1] Rev 1–3; [2] Rev 4–7; [3] Rev 8:1–11:14; [4] Rev 11:15–14:20; [5] Rev 15–16; [6] Rev 17:1–21:8; [7] Rev 21:9–22:21), although he also finds an eightfold division (separating 17:1–21:8 into 17:1–19:10 and 19:11–21:8) plausible. See also Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 175.
- 26 Through redaction criticism, J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation* (AB 38; Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), 46–50 offers a series of six sextets for the ‘original’ Apocalypse: [1] Rev 6:1–17 (6:1–2, 3–4, 5–6, 7–8, 9–11, 12–17); [2] Rev 8:7–11:14 (8:7, 8–9, 10–11, 12–13; 9:1–12; 9:13–11:14); [3] Rev 12:1–14:20 (12:1–2, 3–6; 13:1–18; 13:11–18; 14:1–5, 6–20); [4] Rev 16:2–21 (16:2, 3, 4–7, 8–9, 10–11, 12–16, 17–21); [5] Rev 17:1–19:10 (17:1–6, 7–18; 18:1–8, 9–20, 21–24; 19:1–10); [6] Rev 19:11–20:15 (19:11–16, 17–18, 19–21; 20:1–3, 4–10, 11–15).
- 27 Barbara Wootten Snyder, “Combat Myth in the Apocalypse: The Liturgy of the Day of the Lord and the Dedication of the Heavenly Temple,” (PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union and University of California, Berkeley, 1991), 84 constructs this chiasmus: [A] Rev 1:1–20; [B] Rev 2–3; [C] Rev 4–5; [D] Rev 6:1–8:1; [E] Rev 8:2–9:21; [F] Rev 10; [G] Rev 11; [G’] Rev 12; [F’] Rev 13; [E’] Rev 14; [D’] Rev 15–16; [C’] Rev 17–20; [B’] Rev 21:1–22:5; [A’] Rev 22:6–21. In more broad terms, Fiorenza, *Justice*, 175 offers this chiasmus: [A] Rev 1:1–8; [B] Rev 1:9–3:22; [C] Rev 4:1–9:21; 11:15–19; [D] Rev 10:1–15:4; [C’] Rev 15:1, 5–19:10; [B’] Rev 19:11–22:9; [A’] Rev 22:10–22:21. Highlighting the sevenfold division of this chiasmus, Fiorenza, *Justice*, 176 adds, “Even more significant with respect to Rev. is the fact that the golden candelabra which appears on the arch of Titus in Rome consists of a centerpiece paralleled on either side by three pieces and thus exhibits the pattern ABCDC’B’A’.”
- 28 Rowland, *Heaven*, 417–419, 433–434 lists the following as interludes or “interruptions”: [1] Rev 7; [2] Rev 10:1–11:14; [3] Rev 17–18. See also Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 457–458, who adds Rev 12–14.
- 29 Weiss, *Offenbarung*, 45–145 argues for a redaction tradition in an earlier and shorter “Ancient Johannine-Apocalypse” (Die alte Johannes-Apokalypse—pp. 45–113) discernible from the later additions of the “Remaining Components of the Apocalypse” (Die übrigen Bestandteile der Apokalypse—pp. 113–145); cf. Holtzmann, *Offenbarung*, 303. Ford, *Revelation*, 55–56 envisions the Apocalypse as a Christian redaction of John the Baptist’s revelation (Rev 4–11—pp. 50–53) and a disciple of John the Baptist (Rev 12–22—

and recapitulation.³⁰ The diversity of conclusions illustrates the complexity of Revelation's structure. J. Massyngberde Ford celebrates, "The construction of this apocalypse is unique; in fact, it is the most exquisitely and artistically constructed of all the apocalypses."³¹

Nevertheless, scholars generally agree that some sort of shift occurs in and around Revelation 12:1, viewing it as the beginning of a "new division"³² or a "new sequence"³³ that inaugurates the second half of the book.³⁴ Richard Bauckham observes, "Most attempts to discern the structure of Revelation have found it particularly difficult to see how chapters 12–14 fit into the overall structure. . . . The beginning of chapter 12 seems an uncharacteristically abrupt fresh start, devoid of literary links with anything that precedes."³⁵ Indeed, Revelation 12–14 seems to interject its content into the sequence of seven seals (6:1–8:5) and seven trumpets (8:6–11:19) that would appear to progress seamlessly to the seven bowls (15:1–16:21) that follow. In contrast to redaction theories, however, Bauckham accurately concludes, "It seems we must accept that the abrupt transition is intentional. John has made it abrupt precisely in order to create the impression of a fresh start."³⁶

Significantly, Revelation 12 replaces the foreground with images and characters previously found in the background of Revelation 1–11.³⁷ So, while Satan is found in Revelation 2:9, 13, 24, and 3:9, he appears in Revelation 12:3 as "a great

pp. 54–55). After surfacing grammatical oddities in Rev 20:1–10, Bauer, *Messiasreich*, 184 concludes, "Diese Beobachtungen legen es nahe, dass sich der Abschnitt 20,1–10 aus verschiedenen Traditionsstücken zusammensetzt, die kaum miteinander abgeglichen sind." For discussion and critique of the redaction position, see Fiorenza, *Justice*, 160–164.

30 Collins, *Combat Myth*, 8–19, 43, 207–243; Beale, *Revelation*, 121–144; Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 1993), 3–15; Lowery, *Rhapsody*, 121–143.

31 Ford, *Revelation*, 46. However, she inaccurately continues, "So masterfully is the text arranged that one cannot doubt the work of an editor." Cf. Fiorenza, *Justice*, 16; Bauckham, *Climax*, 20.

32 Ford, *Revelation*, 194–195.

33 Collins, *Combat Myth*, 157.

34 Karrer, *Johannesoffenbarung*, 227–230; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis & Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 112; Mounce, *Revelation*, 229. Farrer, *Rebirth*, 45 argues that the second half begins in 11:15 while Aune, *Revelation*, 2:661–664 suggests 11:19 [see also David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge, 1998), 101ff].

35 Bauckham, *Climax*, 15. See also Kümmel, *Introduction*, 457–458; Lowery, *Rhapsody*, 134–135; Blount, *Revelation*, 223.

36 Bauckham, *Climax*, 15. Cf. Weiss, *Offenbarung*, 79–100, 133–142.

37 Barr, *Tales*, 102.

red dragon" (δράκων μέγας πυρρός) and dominates the plot that follows (12:3–6, 7–9, 10–12, 13–17; 13:1–10, 11–18; 16:12–16; 20:1–3, 7–10; cf. 14:9–12; 17:3–17; 18:2–19:2; 19:17–21). Similarly, an enigmatic beast arises from the abyss in Revelation 11:7 (τὸ θηρίον τὸ ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου) and kills the two witnesses. In Revelation 13, the beast imagery is bifurcated and defined in the beast from the sea (13:1–10) and the beast from the earth (13:11–18), both of whom play significant roles in the narrative that follows (14:9–12; 15:1–2; 16:1–2, 10–11, 12–16; 17:1–6, 7–11, 12–17; 19:17–21; cf. 20:4–6, 10). Thus, Revelation 12–14 introduces the key antagonists of the storyline: Satan, the two beasts, and Babylon.³⁸

In what follows, the key antagonists pursue (12:17; cf. 17:13–14; 19:19; 20:9a) and conquer (13:7; 18:24; 19:2) the saints through deception (12:9; 13:14; 16:13–16; 18:23; 19:20), violence (13:7, 10, 16; 16:5–6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2), and intimidation (13:3, 4, 5–6, 8, 12–13, 14–17). The amalgamation of victorious and fearful images (i.e., 12:7–9 and 12:17) accentuates the tension in the storyline: conquest of the dragon (12:11–12a) and yet his unbridled fury (12:12b), destruction of the prostitute (17:1) and yet her inebriation on the blood of the saints (17:6). The presence of the key antagonists immerse the narrative in conflict awaiting resolution.³⁹

In Revelation 18:1–20:10, the tension is resolved.⁴⁰ Beginning with Babylon in Revelation 18, the key antagonists are each destroyed in the opposite order they were introduced.⁴¹ Introduced second, the two beasts from Revelation 13 are disposed second by being thrown into the lake of fire (19:20) at the appearance of the rider on the white horse (19:11–16). In dramatic fashion, the great red dragon is bound by an angel (20:1–2) and imprisoned (20:3) for 1,000 years, after which his destruction befalls (20:7–10).⁴²

Finally, tension resolves, consummation occurs, and the promises of Revelation 2–3 are realized. The climactic divergence of the key antagonists complements the vivid convergence of the new heaven and the new earth (21:1–8). In the letters to the seven churches (2:1–3:22), each conclusion contains a promise to “the one conquering (ὁ νικῶν—2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21;

38 Babylon is mentioned for the first time in Rev 14:8 in a proleptic proclamation of judgment (see Rev 16:19). The destruction of the prostitute who bears the name “Babylon the Great” on her forehead foreshadows the destruction of Babylon vividly described in Rev 18:1–19:3.

39 Collins, *Combat Myth*, 29.

40 Fiorenza, *Justice*, 172–173 supports a minor chiasmus in this text: [A] the city of Babylon (Rev 17:1–19:10); [B] the judgments of the two beasts and Satan (Rev 19:11–21:8); [A'] the city of the New Jerusalem (21:9–22:9).

41 Fiorenza, *Justice*, 56; Lowery, *Rhapsody*, 135–136.

42 Rowland, *Heaven*, 434–435 argues for recapitulation in these events. See also Bauckham, *Climax*, 19–21; Boxall, *Revelation*, 286.

cf. 21:7)” fulfilled only in the new heaven and new earth (21:1ff.). Thus, the climactic tension in Revelation 20:7–10 precipitates Revelation’s pinnacle in 21:1–8.⁴³

As the penultimate moment in the narrative, then, Revelation 20:7–10 demands significant investigation. Yet, if intertextual explorations are insufficient, historical inquiries and sociological explorations deficient, and theological systems contrived at best, then how does one answer the question: Why *must* Satan be released?⁴⁴ A closer examination of Revelation 20:1–10 offers some clues.

John’s Portrait: Overlooked Anomalies in Revelation 20:1–3, 7–10

In Revelation 20:1–3 and 7–10, there are important details used to paint the picture that are often overlooked or seen as anomalous. First, Revelation 20:1–3 describes two actions done to Satan by the angel from heaven: (1) Satan is bound and (2) he is imprisoned. Along with the key to the Abyss, the angel from heaven holds the “great chain” that he uses to bind Satan. The term αλυσίς (‘chain’) describes the shackles that bind the hands of the captive⁴⁵ and sometimes even his feet as well.⁴⁶ Thus, the portrait painted shows Satan as a criminal bound with manacles in 20:2.⁴⁷ In a separate event, the angel imprisons Satan in the Abyss in 20:3a. With these two distinct actions by the angel (binding and imprisonment), Satan awaits his foretold release for a thousand years (20:3b).

In Revelation 20:7, one of these actions is undone while the other is never mentioned. The release of Satan is specifically labeled in the text as a discharge

43 Rowland, *Heaven*, 423, 436; Farrer, *Rebirth*, 45; Kümmel, *Introduction*, 458.

44 Other attempts to answer this question include: Charles T. Chapman, *The Message of the Book of Revelation* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1995), 122 spiritualizes the event to avoid the question; Virgil A. Cruz, “Jesus Shall Reign: A Biblical Understanding of the Millennium,” *RefR* 52.2 (1998–1999): 89–90 suggests God is setting up a divine mouse trap for evil humanity dormant throughout the millennium; Walvoord, *Revelation*, 303 contends that God is justifying his actions of judgment before man; Jonathan MacKinney, *Revelation: Plain and Simple* (Longwood, Fla.: Xulon, 2006), 453 argues that the event intends to reveal Satan’s true nature for all to see.

45 Acts 12:7; Philo, *Flacc.* 74.

46 Mark 5:4; Luke 8:29; Acts 21:33. Cf. Acts 28:20; 2 Tim 1:16; Eph 6:20; Wis 17:16.

47 Mounce, *Revelation*, 361.

“from his prison” (ἐκ τῆς φυλακῆς αὐτοῦ—20:7).⁴⁸ While the release from prison is appalling, it is important to note the picture John paints. The events in Revelation 20:1–3 are only partially reversed; the text never mentions that Satan is unbound from his chains.⁴⁹ In other words, Satan is released from his prison still bound in shackles.⁵⁰

Second, Revelation 20:3b indicates that Satan does not escape or claw his way out of his prison; he is released by means of a divine mandate. The Greek word δεῖ, translated ‘must,’ is defined in similar contexts as a “Greek particle . . . which means ‘it is necessary,’ [and] was often used with the sense of ‘divine destiny’ or ‘unavoidable fate.’”⁵¹ In other words, the δεῖ designates the divine necessity for Satan to be released—it is orchestrated by God, not by Satan.⁵² This is emphasized by the passive ‘released’ (λυθήσεται) in 20:7, where the action is done *to* Satan and not *by* Satan. So although the text ostensibly shows Satan leading an escape and rebellion, between the lines the text discloses a divine hand that guides and directs Satan, for purposes yet to be revealed.

In sum, the picture painted in Revelation 20:1–3 and 7–10 shows Satan bound by an angel from heaven and then thrown into prison. After a thousand years, Satan is released by God from prison to march across the breadth of the earth, while still bound with manacles. So, what is John trying to communicate

48 The prison in 20:7 is equivalent to the abyss of 20:3, since that is the location into which he was thrown. See Ben Witherington III, *Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 247; Beale, *Revelation*, 1021; William H. Shea, “The Parallel Literary Structure of Revelation 12 and 20,” *AUSS* 23.1 (1985): 43.

49 Revelation expects the audience to follow its imagery throughout the text without necessitating a full explanation every time it is used. For example, the term ‘key’ (κλείς) is used four times in Revelation (1:18; 3:7; 9:1; 20:1). The initial usage in 1:18 governs the symbolic interpretation of the other three usages. In 1:18 the ‘keys’ refer to Jesus’ sovereignty over death and Hades attained through his life, death, and resurrection. Thus, the ‘key’ in Rev 3:7; 9:1, and here in 20:1 refers to the same sovereignty achieved through Christ’s ministry. The prior articulation of the ‘key’ imagery in 1:18, then, precludes repetition of its full explanation in 20:1 as the angel exerts authority over Satan in his binding and imprisonment. Similarly, the beast imagery of Rev 17 assumes the reader remembers the significance and nuances of the beast from the sea in chapter 13. Again, with the introduction of the false prophet imagery in Rev 16:13; 19:20, and 20:10 in tandem with the ‘beast,’ Revelation expects the audience to connect this new image (the false prophet) with the ministry, nuances, and allegiances of the beast from the earth in Rev 13—the second part of the beastly duo. In other words, the text expects the audience to follow its imagery.

50 Ekkehardt Muller, “Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 20,” *AUSS* 37.2 (1999): 232.

51 “δεῖ,” BAG: 172.

52 Rowland, *Heaven*, 436. See also Matt 26:54; Mark 8:31; 13:7; Luke 24:26, 44; Rev 1:1; 4:1.

with these details? What does this imagery depict? Put another way, ‘Why *must* Satan be released?’

The answer does not surface in Old Testament allusions or theological schemas; instead, the picture is found in ‘points of conversation’ with the Roman Empire. As described in chapter three above, imperial ideology was communicated in the public transcript through static (e.g., coins, altars, statues, etc.) and enacted (e.g., rituals, processions, ceremonies, etc.) propaganda. These depictions of the sovereign narrative saturated the Roman world, including the cities of Asia Minor in Revelation 2–3. It is from this reservoir of images (‘points of conversation’) that the Apocalypse constructs the picture of Satan’s release. More specifically, Revelation 20:7–10 depicts the release of Satan through a key conduit of the Flavian ‘foundational myth’: the Roman triumphal procession.⁵³

The Roman Triumph in the Roman Empire

Scott J. Hafemann describes the Roman triumph as “the most important and well-known political religious institution of the period.”⁵⁴ As argued in chapter three above, the Roman triumphal procession uniquely unites the three key messages of the Roman sovereign narrative in one moment of enacted propaganda. The Roman triumph is a celebration of the dominance of Rome that anticipates a lasting peace through the subjugation of a defeated enemy, all of which is brought about by the favor of the gods.

Indeed, as seen in the previous chapter, the Roman triumphal procession of 71 CE played a prominent role in the ‘foundational myth’ of the Flavian dynasty—imperial propaganda to legitimize their claim to the throne.⁵⁵ This

53 The terms ‘Roman triumphal procession,’ ‘triumphal procession,’ ‘Roman triumph,’ and ‘triumph’ are used interchangeably.

54 S.J. Hafemann, “Roman Triumph,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (eds. Craig Evans and Stanley Porter; Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 1004. Although some scholars argue for an Etruscan origin for the procession in the late sixth century BCE [so David Andrew Thomas, *Revelation 19 in Historical and Mythological Context* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 2, 21–24; H.S. Versnel, *Triumphus: An Inquiry into the Origin, Development and Meaning of the Roman Triumph* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 55], Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 305–318 argues that there is no evidence for such a conclusion. For Roman triumphs mimicked in more contemporary events (e.g., Napoleon, celebration of the Spanish-American war, etc.), see Harald Kimpel and Johanna Werckmeister, eds., *Triumphzüge: Paraden durch Raum und Zeit* (Marburg: Jonas-Verlag, 2001).

55 See Tessa Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His Society* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 218.

potent event, however, is not just imperial propaganda. The Roman triumph is an invitation for the onlookers to *participate* in both the victory and perpetuity of the divinely ordained Roman dominance.⁵⁶

*Key Features in the Roman Triumphal Procession*⁵⁷

At the inception of the triumphal procession, the city streets are crowded with people in white garments attempting to catch glimpses of the parade.⁵⁸ The procession displays a wide array of plunder from the military victory that heralds the wide-reaching dominance of Rome, including foreign weaponry,⁵⁹ exotic plants and animals,⁶⁰ royal furniture,⁶¹ and brilliant treasures.⁶² The spoils are punctuated by lists of lands conquered,⁶³ placards with military statistics,⁶⁴ and vivid depictions of battles in the war.⁶⁵ The cumulative effect of these elements is to experientially displace the observer from the side of the city streets to the frontlines of the celebrated battle. Indeed, as Josephus

56 Polyb. 6.15.8. See also Anatheia E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 162–163.

57 Although there is no set template for every triumphal procession—for each triumph contained nuances and artistic liberties that emphasized the emperor's desired message—the frequent repetition of certain features has led to a general consensus by scholars on some of the 'key elements' in each triumph. For further discussion, see Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Edward Champlin, "Agamemnon at Rome: Roman dynasts and Greek heroes," in *Myth, History and Culture in Republican Rome* (eds. David Braund and Christopher Gill; Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2003), 295–319; Thomas, *Revelation*, 24–25; Beard, *Triumph*, 80–106.

58 Plutarch, *Aem.* 32.2; Ovid, *Pont.* 2.1. See also Hemer, *Letters*, 147; Thomas, *Revelation*, 79; Robert Payne, *The Roman Triumph* (London: Robert Hale, 1962), 148.

59 Appian, *Mith.* 116; Livy 34.52; Plutarch, *Flam.* 14.1; Plutarch, *Aem.* 32.5–7.

60 Plants: Pliny, *H.N.* 12.9; Vell. Pat. 56.2. Animals: Pliny, *H.N.* 7.45; 8.2; Appian, *Pun.* 66; Josephus, *J.W.* 7.136.

61 Appian, *Mith.* 116; Josephus, *J.W.* 7.148–150.

62 Vell. Pat. 56.2; Appian, *Pun.* 66; Plutarch, *Flam.* 14.1–2; Plutarch, *Aem.* 32.8–9; Plutarch, *Luc.* 36.7; Josephus, *J.W.* 7.134; Suet., *Aug.* 41.1; Dio Cass. 51.21.7; Tac., *Ann.* 2.41. Cf. Dio Cass. 67.7.4.

63 Pliny, *H.N.* 5.36–37; Livy 37.59.3; Plutarch, *Pomp.* 45.2. See also, Tac., *Ann.* 2.41; Propertius 3.4.16; Dio Cass. 68.29.2.

64 Appian, *Mith.* 117; Plutarch, *Pomp.* 45.1–3.

65 Appian, *Mith.* 117; Appian, *Pun.* 66; Tac., *Ann.* 2.41; Josephus, *J.W.* 7.139–142, 143–144. See also, Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., "Triumph," in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 897; Laura Salah Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture: The Second-Century Church Amid the Spaces of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 162.

recounts the visual displays of the Flavian triumph over the Jews in 71 CE, he lauds that it is “as if [the onlookers] had been there really present.”⁶⁶

Furthermore, the presence of subjugated enemy soldiers amidst the booty accentuates audience participation in the Roman triumph. As Ovid details Tiberius’ triumph in 12 CE, “Before him, silver counterparts of the conquered walls, barbarian towns were carried with pictured men upon them, rivers and mountains and battles in deep forests, shields and spears in a confused pile, and from the gold of the trophies kindled by the sun, the buildings of the Roman forum turned to gold. *So many chieftains bore chains upon their vanquished necks that they could almost suffice to be the enemy [army].*”⁶⁷ The defeat of a weak opponent, however, does not carry much honor or dignity, and therefore, the “tallest and most beautiful” captive soldiers are reserved for the triumphal procession.⁶⁸ Marched in their “native costumes,”⁶⁹ the enemy captives, at times, are forced to reenact moments of their defeat—moments that bring humiliation for the defeated enemy and adulation for the captivated audience.⁷⁰

The rapturous atmosphere, however, reaches its pinnacle with the emergence of [1] the triumphant emperor and [2] the chief enemy leader bound in chains. The emperor enters the parade in a chariot pulled by four white horses, known as the *quadriga*.⁷¹ If the members of the royal family do not accompany

66 Josephus, *J.W.* 7.146.

67 Ovid, *Pont.* 2.1 (Wheeler, LCL) [*emphasis added*]. Cf. Ovid, *Tr.* 4.2.

68 Josephus, *J.W.* 6.417. Cf. Florus 1.38.10. See also Beard, *Triumph*, 134–135.

69 Appian, *Mith.* 116 (White, LCL); Florus 1.37.5.

70 Josephus, *J.W.* 7.142–147, “... many resemblances of the war, and those in several ways, and variety of contrivances, affording a most lively portraiture of itself; for there was to be seen a happy country laid waste, and entire squadrons of enemies slain; while some of them ran away, and some were carried into captivity; with walls of great altitude and magnitude overthrown, and ruined by machines; with the strongest fortifications taken, and the walls of most populous cities upon the tops of hills seized on, and an army pouring itself within the walls; as also every place full of slaughter, and supplications of the enemies, when they were no longer able to lift up their hands in way of opposition. Fire also sent upon temples was here represented, and houses overthrown and falling upon their owners ... *On the top of every one of these pageants was placed the commander of the city that was taken, and the manner wherein he was taken*” (*emphasis added*). See also Josephus, *J.W.* 6.418; 7.96; Vell. Pat. 56.1; Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 15, 162, 242; Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 148–149.

71 The *quadriga* was, at times, used as a metonymy for the entire triumphal procession. So, Augustus: *RIC* 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 107a, 107b, 108a, 108b, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113a, 113b, 131, 132, 133, 134a, 134b, 135, 136, 137, 144, 145, 221, 222, 223, 224, 258, 259, 263, 303, 399, 508, 509, 510. Tiberius: *RIC* 1, 2, 3, 4. Caligula: *RIC* 36. Claudius: *RIC* 122. Nero: *RIC* 4, 5, 6 [elephant],

the emperor in the *quadriga*, then sometimes they ride in close proximity on single horses.⁷² Typically the emperor is dressed in a tunic ordained with palm designs and draped with a purple toga laced with gold thread.⁷³ The emperor also bears a crown upon his head⁷⁴ and key depictions of Jupiter to emphasize his divine connection.⁷⁵

Directly in front of the triumphant emperor's *quadriga* marches the chief enemy leader bound in chains.⁷⁶ The significance of this element can hardly be overstated. Following the battle of Actium, Dio Cassius records Augustus' zeal to capture Cleopatra alive "to carry her back for his triumph" (51.11.3), which even includes a resuscitation attempt after her successful suicide (51.14.3). Her death is "excessively grieved" by Augustus, "as if he had been deprived of all the glory of his victory" (51.14.6; Cary, LCL). To salvage this essential feature of his triumphal procession, Augustus has "an effigy of the dead Cleopatra upon a

7 [elephants], 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 498, 500. Galba: *RIC* 33, 134. Vespasian: *RIC* 44, 54, 68, 159, 163, 206, 207, 273, 294, 364, 368, 451, 524, 536, 546, 612, 629a, 629b, 638, 645, 658, 688, 700. Titus: *RIC* 6, 12, 18, 60, 61, 102, 143, 144. Domitian: *RIC* 128, 165, 185, 185a, 204, 207, 222, 261 [elephants], 391 [elephants], 416 [elephants]. See also *Res gest. divi Aug.* 35 and the monument of Marcus Aurelius' triumph (176–180 CE; Beard, *Triumph*, 220, fig. 31). For more, see Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 161, 270.

72 Suet., *Tib.* 6.4; Appian, *Pun.* 66; Dio Cass. 6.21. See also Beard, *Triumph*, 19 (fig. 3) for numismatic evidence of Pompey's son riding on a horse next to the *quadriga* in one of his three triumphs in 80, 71, and 61 BCE.

73 Livy 45.40; Ovid, *Ars am.* 1.214; Plutarch, *Mar.* 12.5. Peter Marshall, "A Metaphor of Social Shame: ΘΠΑΜΒΕΥΕΙΝ in 2 Cor. 2:14," *NovT* 25.4 (1983): 304; Hafemann, "Roman," 1005.

74 Hafemann, "Roman," 1005. More accurately, the crown usually was held above the head of the emperor by a slave that trailed behind him in the chariot. See Beard, *Triumph*, 85–92; Thomas, *Revelation*, 76–77.

75 Aune, *Revelation*, 3:1051. Livy 10.7.10 (Foster, LCL) says the emperor was "decked with the robes of Jupiter" and some scholars suggest that the face of the emperor was painted with red to parallel Jupiter (based on Pliny, *H.N.* 33.1–2). These symbols (along with others) suggest that the emperor was intentionally portrayed as both god and king (so Versnel, *Triumphus*, 84–93; Thomas, *Revelation*, 42–58). For a complete discussion, see Beard, *Triumph*, 219–256.

76 Regarding the position of the bound enemy leader, Beard, *Triumph*, 124–125 decides, "... ancient writers are almost unanimous in identifying their place in the procession: *ante currum*, 'in front of the general's chariot.' ... this phrase, in fact, is repeated so often that it seems almost the standard term in ancient triumphal jargon—both in literary texts and inscriptions—for leading a victim 'in a triumphal procession.'" See also Dio Cass. 51.21.9; Livy 6.4. For chains binding the chief enemy leader, see Ovid, *Ars am.* 1.2.30; *Tr.* 4.2; Horace, *Carm.* 2.1; Cicero, *Verr.* 2.5.66; Florus 1.36.17. See also Beard, *Triumph*, 133; Hafemann, "Roman," 1005.

couch” carried in the parade, “so that in a way she . . . was a part of the spectacle and a trophy in the procession.”⁷⁷

Indeed, emperors stretch to great lengths to have the chief enemy leader present at the triumphal procession—even imprisoning the captive leader for years after the end of the battle in order to recall them for the magnificent parade. As Cicero observes, “But even those who have triumphs, and who on that account keep the generals of the enemy alive a longer time, in order that, while they are led in triumph, the Roman people may enjoy an ennobling spectacle, and a splendid fruit of victory.”⁷⁸ The bound enemy leader is even found in static propaganda as a metonymy of the Roman triumph.⁷⁹

The march of the captive leader is thus an essential feature of the triumphal procession. The final destination of the parade is the steps of Jupiter’s temple.⁸⁰ It is here that the audience waits in silence for the commencement of the pinnacle moment of the Roman triumph.⁸¹ Hafemann writes, “At the climax of the pageant, those prisoners and royalty who had been led in triumph and were not destined to be sold into slavery were executed in honor to the victor as the ultimate sign of his conquest and in homage to Rome’s deity.”⁸²

The triumphal procession is both the climax of honor for Rome and the climax of humiliation for Rome’s enemy.⁸³ A Roman triumph is enacted propaganda that impresses the sovereign narrative of Rome into the mind of the onlooker, whose role blurs between observer and participant. In the triumphal procession, the dominance of Rome accents the favor of the gods, who provide the empire with peace through a victorious war.

The Roman Triumph in Imperial Propaganda

It comes as no surprise, then, to find the Roman world inundated with imagery in static propaganda from the Roman triumph.⁸⁴ In addition to the *Fasti*

77 Dio Cass. 51.21.8 (Cary, LCL). See also Dio Cass. 61.32.4a; Tac., *Ann.* 12.21, 36; Vell. Pat. 2.121.3.

78 Verr. 2.5.66 (Yonge). See Thomas, *Revelation*, 38.

79 So Augustus: *RIC* 6; Claudius: *RIC* 69, 70; Vitellius: *RIC* 151; Vespasian: *RIC* 16, 114, 115, 201, 208, 287, 289, 294, 424, 425, 426; Titus: *RIC* 1, 2, 5, 11, 17, 17a, 21a, 21b; Domitian: *RIC* 252, 255, 266, 278, 279, 285, 312, 318. Cf. Galba: *RIC* 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84.

80 For a complete route of the triumphal procession, see Beard, *Triumph*, 335.

81 Josephus, *J.W.* 7.153.

82 Hafemann, “Roman,” 1005. See Cicero, *Verr.* 2.5.77; Plutarch, *Aem.* 33.3–34.2; 36.6; *Ant.* 84.2–4; Appian, *Mith.* 117; Josephus, *J.W.* 6.433–434; 7.153. At some point in the procession, the enemies would be led away from the parade and a signal of their execution would ignite jubilation at the conclusion of the triumph. See Beard, *Triumph*, 14, 128–132.

83 Beard, *Triumph*, 123, 181. See Josephus, *J.W.* 7.153–157.

84 Beard, *Triumph*, 18–19 describes the significance of the Roman triumph in static propaganda, “Public spectacles are usually ephemeral events . . . It is, of course, in the interests

Triumphales with over two hundred triumphs inscribed in the public forum,⁸⁵ triumphal processions are referenced over three hundred times in Roman literature.⁸⁶ The depictions of the triumph decorated the cities⁸⁷ and adorned imperial coinage,⁸⁸ immersing the subjects of the empire in this potent symbol of dominance and divine favor.⁸⁹

of the sponsors to ensure that the memory lasts, to give the fleeting spectacle a more permanent form, to spread the experience beyond the lucky few who were present on the day itself" (cf. Thomas, *Revelation*, 3, 27). In the time of Augustus, the triumphal procession experienced a major shift when the ritual was restricted only to members of the royal family. Some see this action to be a political move to consolidate power and adulation to one man and one family. It was also at this time that the Roman triumphal imagery began to inundate the empire through coins, monuments, buildings, and other forms of propaganda. Beard, *Triumph*, 296 sees this as the inauguration of "the age of the triumph." For a full discussion, see Beard, *Triumph*, 61–71, 294–305; Miriam Griffin, "Urbs Roma, Plebs and Princeps," in *Images and Empire* (ed. Loveday Alexander; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1991), 42; Thomas, *Revelation*, 29–30, 47–49.

- 85 The *Fasti Triumphales* (also known as the *Fasti Capitolini*) begins with the presumed first triumph of Romulus (735 BCE) and ends with Lucius Cornelius Balbus (19 BCE). For more discussion, see Beard, *Triumph*, 61–67.
- 86 Peter Marshall, "Metaphor," 304. Triumphs in literature include: Plutarch, *Aem.* 32–35; Polyb. 30.25–26; Cicero, *Fam.* 7.1.2–3; Luc. 1.12; Sil. 17.625–54; Ovid, *Ars am.* 1.217–22; Varro, *Rust.* 3.2.15–16; Horace, *Carm.* 1.37, 29–32; Appian, *Pun.* 66; Dio Cass. 6.21; 43.14–23; Suet., *Nero* 25; Josephus, *J.W.* 7.116–7.157.
- 87 Peter Marshall, "Metaphor," 304. Some examples include: the arch of Titus (early 80s CE), the arches of Germanicus (19 CE), the Arch of Trajan (114 CE), the Forum of Augustus (Suet., *Aug.* 29.2; 31.5), and the temple of Pompey. For a description of Pompey's temple made out of the spoils of the triumph and dedicated to commemorate the event, see Beard, *Triumph*, 21–29. For Roman triumphs in art, see: Pliny *H.N.* 35.27, 93–4; Servius, *Aen.* 1.294.
- 88 Larry J. Kreitzer, *Striking New Images: Roman Imperial Coinage and the New Testament World* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1996), 52–57, 126–144, 212–219. Augustus: *RIC* 4a, 4b, 5, 6, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 107a, 107b, 108a, 108b, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113a, 113b, 131, 132, 133, 134a, 134b, 135, 136, 137, 144, 145, 221, 222, 223, 224, 258, 259, 263, 303, 359, 399, 508, 509, 510. Tiberius: *RIC* 1, 2, 3, 4. Caligula: *RIC* 36. Claudius: *RIC* 3, 4, 30, 33, 34, 35, 44, 45, 69, 70, 71, 72, 98, 122. Nero: *RIC* 4, 5, 6, 7, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 498, 500. Galba: *RIC* 33, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 134. Vitellius: *RIC* 151. Concerning the function of the Roman triumph on coins, Beard, *Triumph*, 20 writes, "Alongside their obvious economic functions, these coins would have been a prompt to reimagining the spectacle maybe years after, or miles distant from, its original performance."
- 89 Beard, *Triumph*, 265 describes the Roman triumph as "embedded in the day-to-day political, social, and cultural world of Rome, with innumerable links and associations, both personal and institutional, to other ceremonies, customs, events, and traditions."



FIGURE 6.1 70–71 CE. Dedicated to Vespasian and adorned with Roman triumphal procession imagery.

VESPASIAN: RIC 294. IMAGE USED WITH PERMISSION OF IRA & LARRY GOLDBERG COINS & COLLECTIBLES, INC.

In fact, as seen in chapter five above, the Flavians used the Roman triumph in 71 CE as a moment that “marked the definitive announcement of the new dynasty in Rome.”⁹⁰ The triumphal procession was enacted propaganda that celebrated the inauguration of a dynastic shift in the history of Rome. Indeed, the Flavian ‘foundational myth’ consistently references the triumph in static propaganda to remind the empire of their legitimate claim to the throne. As seen on the coin above (minted in 70–71 CE), the obverse depicts the profile of Vespasian crowned with laurel. The reverse portrays Vespasian in the Roman triumph of 71 CE. Riding in the *quadriga*, Vespasian extends a palm branch over the head of a trumpeter while being crowned by Victory. Directly in front of the four horses, a Roman soldier escorts a captive whose hands are bound behind his back. As heralded in the triumphal procession of 71 CE, the coin loudly proclaims the accession of the Flavian dynasty in its symbolism as well as its caption: TRIVMP AVG.⁹¹

90 Carlos F. Noreña, “Medium and Message in Vespasian’s Templum Pacis,” *MAAR* 48 (2003): 39. Josephus, *J.W.* 7.115–157. See also Richard Alston, *Aspects of Roman History AD 14–117* (London: Routledge, 1998), 157, 168; Mary Beard, “The Triumph of Flavius Josephus,” in *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (eds. A.J. Boyle and W.J. Dominik; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 558.

91 See also Vespasian: *RIC* 15, 16, 44, 54, 68, 114, 115, 159, 163, 201, 206, 207, 208, 273, 287, 289, 294, 364, 368, 424, 425, 426, 451, 524, 536, 546, 612, 629a, 629b, 637, 645, 658, 688, 700. Titus:



FIGURE 6.2 *Temple of the Sebasteion Altar—Left side panel.*

PICTURE TAKEN BY AUTHOR.

Still further, the city of Ephesus (Rev 2:1–7) had a magnificent temple dedicated to the imperial cult worship of the Flavian family⁹² along a main city road that

RIC 1, 2, 5, 6, 11, 12, 17, 17a, 18, 21a, 21b, 60, 61, 102, 143, 144. Domitian: *RIC* 128, 165, 185, 185a, 204, 207, 222, 252, 255, 261, 266, 278, 279, 285, 312, 318, 391, 416.

⁹² This temple in Ephesus has traditionally been labeled the ‘temple of Domitian,’ but Steven J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia, and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 29–49 (esp. 35–38) forcefully argues that the more accurate title is the ‘temple of the Sebasteion.’ He concludes, “Thus, on the basis of the description of the cult in the temple inscriptions, it is clear that the provincial cult of the Sebasteion in Ephesus was a cult for the emperors of the Flavian family, and perhaps included Domitia” (p. 36).



FIGURE 6.3 *Temple of the Sebasteion Altar—Front right panel.*

PICTURE TAKEN BY AUTHOR.

leads to the agora past the frequented bath houses, public restrooms, and even the local Jewish synagogue.⁹³ In this location of intersection, just outside of the imperial cult temple, sacrifices in honor of the emperor were offered on an altar decorated with static propaganda.

As can be seen in the museum of Ephesus today, this ‘open air’ altar at the Flavian temple (figures 6.2–6.4) is decorated with Roman triumph imagery. On the far left end, the altar shows a bull slightly kneeling toward an altar, designating the animal as a sacrifice, with laurel décor lining the top: a specific symbol of Roman triumphs.⁹⁴ At the opposite end of the altar two large shields are depicted, comparable to the motif on the front side.

For further analysis, see Friesen, *Neokoros*, 69, 155–156; idem, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 43–55; S.R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (9th ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 129, 178, 181–182, 196–198.

93 For a diagram of ancient Ephesus and the location of the temple of the Sebasteion, see Price, *Rituals*, 139 (although he labels the structure the ‘temple of Domitian’).

94 See Horace, *Carm.* 3, 30; Pliny, *H.N.* 15.133–135; Appian, *Pun.* 66. For a discussion on the significance of laurel, see Beard, *Triumph*, 52, 229, 246–247, 287–288.



FIGURE 6.4 *Temple of the Sebastoi Altar—Front center panel.*

PICTURE TAKEN BY AUTHOR.

The front panel contains a conglomeration of foreign weapons, armor, and booty, symbolizing the spoils of war marched in a triumphal procession. All of the spoils of war from both sides direct the attention of the passersby to the two figures in the middle. One stands in Roman military garb, a weapon raised, looking down at the second figure: a seated, single bound captive awaiting his execution.

In addition to other Roman triumph depictions throughout the empire, the imagery on the altar in Ephesus reiterates the Flavian ‘foundational myth’ with the triumphal procession of 71 CE (enacted propaganda) frozen in stone (static propaganda) at its climactic moment: the execution of the chief enemy leader. Mary Beard concludes, “I have come to read the Roman triumph in a sense that goes far beyond its role as a procession through the streets. Of course it was that. But it was also a cultural idea, a ‘ritual in ink,’ a trope of power, a metaphor of love, a thorn in the side, a world view, a dangerous hyperbole, a marker of time, of change, and continuity.”⁹⁵ Thus, the pervasiveness of the triumphal imagery in the imperial propaganda of Rome and in the Flavian sovereign narrative presents the Roman triumphal procession as a potent ‘point of conversation’ for subject texts like the book of Revelation.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Beard, *Triumph*, 333.

⁹⁶ So 2 Cor 2:14 and Col 2:15. For further discussion on these two texts, see Lamar Williamson, “Led in Triumph: Paul’s Use of Thriambeuo,” *Int* 22 (1968): 317–322; Hemer, *Letters*, 147;

The Roman Triumph in Revelation 19:11–21

Building upon the suggestion of David Aune, David Andrew Thomas argues persuasively for the Roman triumph as the driving imagery behind Revelation 19:11–21.⁹⁷ Summarily, in Revelation 19:11, Jesus enters the scene on a white horse and is labeled in 19:16 with the regal designation “king of kings and lord of lords.” Jesus’ army surrounds him and is dressed in “fine linen, white and clean” (19:14), like the onlookers of a Roman triumph. Revelation 19:12 describes Jesus as adorned with “many crowns,” in reference to the crowns obtained in battle and celebrated in the triumph.

Adding to Thomas’ observations, instead of military apparel, Jesus approaches the ‘alleged’ battle with attire that celebrates his victory on the cross—his robe dipped in blood (19:13). As Beard observes about the Roman triumph, “Though a military ceremony in many respects, there is no sign that the general ever appeared in military garbs. Quite the reverse: his war was

Beard, *Triumph*, 14 (n. 14); Peter O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 127; Peter Marshall, “Metaphor,” 302–317; cf. Rory B. Egan, “Lexical Evidence on Two Pauline Passages,” *NovT* 19 (1977): 34–62. Scholars suggest Roman triumph parallels in other biblical passages as well, including: Ephesians 4:8 [Thomas, *Revelation*, 63–66]; Mark 15:16–32 [T.E. Schmidt, “Mark 15:16–32: The Crucifixion Narrative and the Roman Triumphal Procession,” *NTS* 41 (1995): 1–18; Paul Brooks Duff, “The March of the Divine Warrior and the Advent of the Greco-Roman King: Mark’s Account of Jesus’ Entry into Jerusalem,” *JBL* 111.1 (1992): 55–71]. In the mid-second century CE, Tertullian, *Apol.* 50.1–3 (*ANF* 3:54–55) writes, “In that case, you say, why do you complain of our persecutions? You ought rather to be grateful to us for giving you the sufferings you want. Well, it is quite true that it is our desire to suffer, but it is in the way that the soldier longs for war. No one indeed suffers willingly, since suffering necessarily implies fear and danger. Yet the man who objected to the conflict, both fights with all his strength, and when victorious, he rejoices in the battle, because he reaps from it glory and spoil. It is our battle to be summoned to your tribunals that there, under fear of execution, we may battle for the truth. But the day is won when the object of the struggle is gained. This victory of ours gives us the glory of pleasing God, and the spoil of life eternal. But we are overcome. Yes, when we have obtained our wishes. Therefore we conquer in dying; we go forth victorious at the very time we are subdued . . . This is the attitude in which we conquer, it is our victory-robe, it is for us a sort of triumphal car.” See also Lactantius, *Inst.* 1.11; John Chrysostom, *Laud. Paul.* 2.3; Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (trans. Lionel R.M. Strachan; New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1908; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 287; Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 68, 238–239.

97 Aune, *Revelation*, 3:1050–1052; Thomas, *Revelation*, 21–89. Thomas’ conclusion, however, suggests that in addition to the Roman triumph, the Nero Myth influences the images and language of Rev 19:11–21.

over.”⁹⁸ Indeed, while portrayals of war play out in the imagery that follows (19:19–21), no war is actually fought; there is only an execution. This is the second out of three scenes in Revelation in which the evil army is “gathered (συνάγω)” to make war (Rev 16:14, 16; Rev 19:17, 19; and 20:8).⁹⁹ Each time, however, there is no battle, just an annihilation.

The ‘no battle’ motif reiterates the battle has already been won on the cross (Rev 1:17–18; 5:6, 9–10, 11–12). Indeed, Revelation 12:10–11a celebrates the military victory over the dragon (12:1–9), “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down (ἐβλήθη), who accuses them day and night before our God. But they have *conquered* him by the blood of the Lamb. . .”¹⁰⁰ As David Barr concludes, “Of course no war is narrated, for the battle is already won by the faithful testimony of Jesus. Of course, the warrior wears a bloodied robe, for he has bled for this victory. . .”¹⁰¹ Like triumphal processions, then, Jesus approaches the event with dress that heralds his war was over—a robe dipped in blood.

Thomas concludes that Revelation 19:11–21 depicts Jesus as the triumphant emperor riding victoriously in his triumphal procession.¹⁰² This conclusion, however, overlooks some significant details as well as the subsequent context. Indeed, in Revelation 19:11–21, Jesus is portrayed with significant elements of the imperial family in the Roman triumph, but it is remiss to assume that he is the triumphant emperor. First, he does not ride in a chariot pulled by four white horses (a *quadriga*).¹⁰³ Although rare exceptions to the presence of the four white horses do exist,¹⁰⁴ numismatics and architecture show that the

98 Beard, *Triumph*, 225.

99 Collins, *Combat Myth*, 36.

100 NRSV (*emphasis added*). In Rev 12, the word ἐβλήθη (‘hurled’) is reiterated in connection to Satan (Rev 12:9 [2x], 10, 13). This same word is used to describe Satan’s imprisonment in 20:3 and his descent into the lake of fire in 20:10. Cf. Rev 19:20.

101 David L. Barr, “The Apocalypse of John as Oral Enactment,” *Int* 40.3 (1986): 137–138. See also: Witherington, *Revelation*, 244. Thompson, *Revelation*, 217 (n. 14) refers to Rev 20:7–10 as the “warless battle.” See also Friesen, *Imperial*, 177, 216; Thompson, *Revelation*, 44, 65, 85; Fiorenza, *Justice*, 121; Rowland, *Heaven*, 434, 436; cf. Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, 167. For more discussion, see chapter 7 below.

102 Thomas, *Revelation*, 74–84, 86–89.

103 As acknowledged by Aune, *Revelation*, 3:1052 and dismissed by Thomas, *Revelation*, 4, 75–76.

104 In one of Pompey’s triumphs in the first century BCE, in order to present himself like the god Bacchus, he used elephants to pull his chariot—although his experiment was ultimately unsuccessful (see Pliny, *H.N.* 8.4; Plutarch, *Pomp.* 14.4; Granius Licinianus 36.3–4).

quadriga was an essential feature of the imagery of the Roman triumph by the time of Domitian's reign.¹⁰⁵

Second, the triumphal procession climaxes with the triumphant emperor *at the end* of the parade, not at the beginning.¹⁰⁶ As stated above, after the procession of the spoils of war and depictions of victory, the chief enemy leader bound in chains marches directly in front of the *quadriga* of the triumphant emperor as the pinnacle of the event. While it is conceivable that a member of the imperial family (e.g., a son) could be amongst the spoils on a single horse, the emperor himself does not process amongst the spoils, because the *quadriga* is an essential feature at the end of the procession. These two points suggest that although Jesus is presented as a part of the imperial family celebrated in the triumph, he is not depicted as the triumphant emperor.

So why does Revelation 19:11–21 distinguish Jesus amidst the procession on a single white horse (19:11)? The Flavian Roman triumph in 71 CE offers a significant parallel to this depiction. In this event, seared in the minds of Jews and Christians alike, Vespasian, the newly inaugurated emperor, rides in the *quadriga* with his son Titus, who was a key general in the victory over the Jewish nation.¹⁰⁷ Domitian, however, rides in the triumph on a *single white horse* in close proximity to his father (Vespasian) and brother (Titus).¹⁰⁸ This striking parallel suggests, then, that John intentionally depicts Jesus in Revelation 19:11–21 as 'the son of god' who rides in his father's triumphal procession on a *single white horse*. This distinction not only draws a connection to the Flavian 'foundational myth,' but it also signals there is more of the parade to come. The procession is not over, but just beginning.

So if Jesus begins the triumphal procession in Revelation 19:11–21, then how does Revelation 20:1–10 fit into the Roman triumph imagery? The answer to this question is also the answer to the query that began this chapter, 'Why *must* Satan be released?'

The origin of the tradition of four white horses goes back to the triumph of Caesar in 46 BCE (Dio Cass. 43.14.3), which intentionally paralleled Jupiter who had his chariot drawn by white horses (Herodotus 7.40; Aeschylus, *Pers.* 386–387). See Beard, *Triumph*, 234–236; Versnel, *Triumphus*, 67.

105 See footnote 71 above.

106 Champlin, "Agamemnon," 295–319; Thomas, *Revelation*, 24–25. Cf. Beard, *Triumph*, 80–106.

107 Dio Cass. 65.12.1a; Suet., *Tit.* 6.1; Josephus, *J.W.* 7.121–122, 152.

108 Suet., *Dom.* 2.1 (Rolfe, LCL), "...[Domitian] also attended [Vespasian and Titus'] triumph over Judaea riding on a white horse." See also Josephus, *J.W.* 7.152; Dio Cass. 65.12.

The Roman Triumph in Revelation 20:7–10

Triumphal procession allusions abound in Revelation 19:11–21, but a climactic feature of the triumph has not yet appeared in the imagery of the Apocalypse: the march of the chief enemy leader bound in chains. As Thomas summarizes:

The most important element of [the Roman triumph] was the parading of live prisoners, especially enemy commanders, princes, and kings. Their eventual sacrifice at the Capitol reveals that the triumph was meant to be more than just a celebration of a past victory or even a means to relive it. The triumph was an act of *consummation*. The victory for the triumphator was not complete until his hated foe was no more, and the triumph was the ordained means to realize this crucial final detail . . . Until the triumph, therefore, the matter was officially and deliberately (if not essentially) left open.¹⁰⁹

Again, the significance of the bound enemy leader for the triumphal procession can hardly be overstated. Although at times the triumph does not occur for months or even years after the battle was won, the chief enemy leader is not killed but imprisoned to preserve this “crucial final detail” of the procession when the war’s *delayed* consummation becomes a reality.¹¹⁰

Similarly, Revelation 20:1–3 contains the ‘delay’ motif with the persistent reiteration that the dragon is detained for “1,000 years” (20:2, 3). Satan is bound (20:2) and imprisoned (20:3a) to preserve him for the divinely ordained moment of his release, which is emphasized in 20:3b, “he *must* be let out for a short time.” The linguistic connection in Revelation 20:2a to Revelation 12:9 reminds the reader of the catalyst for Satan’s defeat: the victory in the battle at the cross.¹¹¹ Similar to Jesus’ attire in Revelation 19:13, the actions taken toward Satan indicate that while the battle is won, victory “was officially and

109 Thomas, *Revelation*, 38.

110 See Beard, *Triumph*, 163–167, 202; Thomas, *Revelation*, 38; Cicero, *Att.* 4.18.4; Dio Cass. 37.47–48; 39.65.

111 Rev 12:9, “ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας ὁ ὄφης ὁ ἀρχαῖος ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς.” Rev 20:2a, “τὸν δράκοντα ὁ ὄφης ὁ ἀρχαῖος ὁ ἐστὶν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς.” Further linguistic connections reiterate this point. The word *κλεῖς* (‘key’) in 20:1 is first used in 1:18 in connection to Jesus’ authority attained at his death. The word *ἔβαλεν* (‘threw’) in 20:3 is also used in 12:9 [2x], 10, 13 when Satan is “hurled down” (12:10) and “conquered” through the “blood of the Lamb” (12:11). See also Rev 5:6, 9–10, 11–12.

deliberately (if not essentially) left open” to await the consummation at God’s triumphal procession.

As mentioned earlier, while Satan is released from prison after the 1,000 year delay in 20:7, he is *not* released from his shackles.¹¹² Through the δεῖ in 20:3b and the unseen hand that releases Satan from prison, God is pictured in Revelation 20:7–10 as sovereignly leading Satan, the bound captive, to God’s intended destination: Satan’s execution.¹¹³ Reminiscent of enemy captives in Roman triumphal processions, Satan reenacts in a dramatic fashion the moment of his defeat.¹¹⁴ As in the previous two ‘battles’ in Revelation 16 and

112 Cf. Dio Cass. 49.40.3–4; Plutarch, *Ant.* 50.4; Vell. Pat. 2.82.3–4; Strabo, *Geogr.* 2.14.15. In addition, Seth Schwartz, *Josephus and Judaeae Politics* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 6 compounds the oddity if Satan’s shackles had been removed: “But Titus suggested that Josephus’ chains be severed, a ceremonial annulment of captive status; ‘for this is done to those who have been bound unjustly’ (BJ 4.628). ‘Thus Josephus acquired *epitimia*’ (BJ 4.629). . . . Josephus seems to be describing a form of *restitution in integrum*, the restoration of a captive, slave, etc., to his *status quo ante* . . .”

113 While the text states that Satan is “tormented day and night for ever and ever,” the language of ‘execution’ is still appropriate for at least two reasons. First, the imagery intends to communicate the final destination of a non-physical being in a location that is consistently emphasized as ‘eternal’ and therefore not bound by the constraints of space and time (Rev 14:11; 19:3; cf. Rev 11:15; 21:25, 27; 22:5). Within these parameters, then, the only way to communicate something comparable to a ‘death’ or an ‘execution’ would be a perpetual state of punishment—or ‘eternal torment.’ Second, similar language to ‘execution’ is associated with the ‘lake of fire’ two times in the immediate context of Rev 20:7–10. In Rev 20:14 and 21:8, the lake of fire is defined as the “second death,” which clarifies the emphasis intended when Satan is thrown into the lake of fire in 20:10—it is his annihilation, death, execution, and/or place of eternal torment. Without moving further into the nature of metaphoric language, it is sufficient, here, to conclude that the use of ‘execution’ in connection to Satan’s final destination is altogether appropriate and even expected given the context of the passage and triumphal imagery developed in the text thus far. See Friesen, *Imperial*, 156; Thompson, *Revelation*, 89–91.

114 As stated previously (see pp. 106–108, 151–153, 201–203), a key feature of a Roman triumph is the dramatization of the vanquished’s moment(s) of defeat—elaborate depictions of “many resemblances of the war” (Josephus, *J.W.* 7.142). Likewise, Revelation’s imagery and grammar surrounding Rev 20:7–10 invokes the same connotative and denotative feature in Satan’s release. First, as stated above, the complete annihilation of rebellious humanity in Rev 19:20–21, directly preceding the binding and imprisonment of Satan (20:1–3) and the 1,000 year reign (20:4–6), prompts questions like: If the rebellious nations are completely destroyed, then who does Satan deceive in 20:7–8? From where does an evil army as numerous as ‘the sand of the sea’ (20:8) come? The peculiar presence of this legion suggests that this is not a new occurrence of prior actions and opportunities by Satan, but a dramatization of a previous defeat. In addition, as stated above, the entire event of Satan’s

19, the enemy is gathered for war, but there is only an annihilation, because like other triumphs, the battle is already won.

Bringing to mind the placards that list statistics and the names of conquered lands in other triumphal processions, Revelation 20:7–8 celebrates the magnitude of this military victory with the pronouncement of the enemy leader's army as numerous as "the sand of the sea."¹¹⁵ Indeed, the names "Gog and Magog" appear in the middle of the text like a banner announcement conjuring up images of a great Jewish battle with cosmic implications.¹¹⁶ The reenactment of their defeat depicts the bound enemy leader in siege of "the barracks of the saints, that is the beloved city,"¹¹⁷ which ends with the conflagration of the enemy army (20:9).¹¹⁸ At this point, the climactic moment of the triumphal

release is introduced with the phrase, "And when the thousand years are completed..." Thus, this event (e.g., the release, the deception, the gathering, the siege, the defeat, etc.) occurs after the second coming. Like the presence of the previously defeated army, this syntactical demarcation suggests that the actions after 20:7a should not be viewed in the same manner as parallel actions and opportunities for Satan prior to the second coming. Given Revelation's emphasis on Satan's defeat at the cross and yet delayed consummation (12:10–12; 19:13; see chapter 7 below for more discussion on this point), it is not surprising to find Satan's actions *after* the second coming in 20:7a described with similar language as his actions *before* the second coming when he was defeated (e.g., deception—12:9; 13:14; 16:13–16; 18:23; 19:20; 20:8; gathering together—16:14, 16; 19:17, 19; 20:8; etc.)—for a Roman triumph dramatizes the defeat of the vanquished with parallel imagery yet in fundamentally different settings. So, if Rev 20:7–10 utilizes the Roman triumph as a 'point of conversation,' actions and imagery reminiscent of the previous battle are expected but, fundamentally, are not the same actions, which, by definition, is a reenactment.

115 Aune, *Revelation*, 3:1095 defines the phrase as "a metaphor for great abundance" (cf. Gen 41:49; Job 29:18; Ps 139:18; Jer 15:8; Hab 1:9; *Pr. Man.* 1:9; *Jos. Asen.* 1:2; *Gk. Apoc. Ezra* 2:32; 3:2. Used for an army: Josh 11:4; Judg 7:12; 1 Sam 13:5; 1 Macc 11:1). Ironically, this metaphor is used in Gen 22:17; 32:12 to describe the people of God.

116 See Sverre Bøe, *Gog and Magog: Ezekiel 38–39 as Pre-text for Revelation 19,17–21 and 20,7–10* (WUNT 2/135; Tübingen: Mohr, 2001).

117 The term *κυκλεύω* ('surrounded') in 20:9 is used elsewhere to describe a military siege (2 Kgs 6:14; 18:13–19:37; Isa 29:3; 36:1–3; Luke 19:43; 21:20; Jdt 7:19–20; 1 Macc 15:14).

118 On the importance of the dramatic reenactment in the triumph, Richard C. Beacham, *Spectacle Entertainments of Early Imperial Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 40 states, "The primary expressive element of a [Roman triumph] is, of course, the ranks of marchers, who . . . are simultaneously the 'performers' as well as a highly effective living scenic device, whose controlled and coordinated movement and sounds can stimulate a powerful emotional response in the spectators. . . . The event is also defined and the emotional response to it informed by a motivating purpose: in the case of the triumph, to

procession is achieved: Satan, the chief enemy leader in chains, is disposed in the lake of fire (20:10).

As in other Roman triumphs, the bound captive leader is not at the beginning of the parade (e.g., Rev 19:11–21) but is put on display as the climactic ‘spoil of war’ that precedes the emergence of the triumphant general.¹¹⁹ It comes as no surprise, then, that immediately following this context is the magnificent procession of the “one on the throne” in 20:11–21:4, which concludes with a depiction of the consummation of the celebrated victory—cosmic *Pax* (21:5–22:6).¹²⁰

Conclusion

A Roman triumphal procession functions to bring the audience into enacted propaganda—to bring the audience into the battle and immerse them in the drama of the victory of the war. The audience, then, actually becomes a participant in the propaganda and not just an observer of the images. The same is true here in Revelation 20:7–10.

According to Revelation, the war is won through Christ’s victory on the cross (i.e., Rev 12:10–11; 19:13). The battle, however, is left open-ended until the triumphal procession. Jesus appears in Revelation 19:11–21 as the ‘son of God’ on a white horse, beginning the triumph that culminates in the emergence of the “one on the throne” in 20:11–21:4. A central feature of this triumph is depicted in 20:1–10 when Satan is bound and imprisoned (20:1–3) to await his role in the parade. Bringing to mind other chief enemy leaders, the dragon is released from his prison and led in chains to reenact his own defeat (20:7–10).

Given the saturation of triumph imagery in Roman static propaganda and the central feature of the triumphal procession in the Flavian ‘foundational myth’ (i.e., the ‘public transcript’), the recipients of Revelation can view the

celebrate an entire panoply of entities—the gods, the state, the conquering general, his soldiers, the captured plunder and the victory.”

119 Single bound captive: Pliny, *H.N.* 35.27, 93–94 (the god ‘War’); Lactantius, *Inst.* 1.11 (the god ‘Jupiter’). Bound captives: Ovid, *Ars am.* 1.2.19–52; frieze at the temple of Apollo Sosianus in Rome (34–25 BCE; Beard, *Triumph*, 133, fig. 23). See also Friesen, *Imperial*, 91.

120 The first time the ‘one on the throne’ is portrayed is in Rev 4:1–11. This scene is heavily reliant on Ezek 1:1–3:13. In Ezekiel’s text God’s throne and the events around it are portrayed in ‘chariot-like’ depictions, reminiscent of the Roman Emperor’s *quadriga* in the triumphal procession.

release of the bound enemy leader (i.e., a 'point of conversation') not as an event to fear but as the consummation of a victorious promise. As in the Roman triumph, this image is the climax of both honor and humiliation. So, why *must* Satan be released? Satan is released so that he can participate in God's triumphal procession.

The Alter-Imperial Paradigm: Revelation and Empire Studies

How does Revelation Interact with the Roman Empire?

The Alter-Imperial paradigm engages this question through several key elements. First, the grammar of the sovereign narrative is analyzed through the imperial billboards that saturate the empire. The static and enacted propaganda of the Roman public transcript provide insight into the grammar used to articulate the Roman sovereign narrative. As a result, analysis of the imperial propaganda not only allows the voice of the empire to be heard more clearly but also allows the echoes of the sovereign narrative in the subject texts to be more readily detectable.

Second, the date of the subject text is established. To understand *what* interaction takes place between the subject text and the sovereign narrative, it is important to establish *when* the conversation occurs. This acknowledges the individual emphases of the sovereign narrative by the various emperors and dynasties in their imperial propaganda. A date of composition isolates the images and conversations relevant to the socio-historical context, which for the book of Revelation is at the end of the reign of Domitian (92–96 CE).

Third, the Alter-Imperial paradigm develops the socio-historical context of the subject text's date. This offers a more detailed picture of how the Roman sovereign narrative was communicated and enforced during that time period. Thus, potential 'points of conversation' with the sovereign narrative emerge that may be utilized in contemporary subject texts.

With the date of the Apocalypse at 92–96 CE, the imperial propaganda of the Flavian dynasty emphasized not only the restoration of *Pax* and the favor of the gods under their reign (after the instability of the civil wars of 68–69 CE) but also the restitution of Roman dominance visible in the complete subjugation of the Jewish nation (from which Christians were not readily distinguished by the Roman elite). Therefore, Anti-Jewish elements were central features in the Flavian dynasty's 'foundational myth,' which is celebrated on coins, with building projects, and in the Roman triumph of 71 CE. This static and enacted propaganda of the Flavian dynasty offers 'points of conversation' for the book of Revelation.

Fourth, the ‘points of conversation’ are used to mine the subject text for imperial intersections. To test the effectiveness of the Alter-Imperial paradigm, Revelation 20:7–10 (the ‘release of Satan’) functions as a case study. While this passage occurs at a climactic moment in the narrative, it is a notoriously difficult text that previous interpretative approaches in Revelation scholarship (i.e., intertextual explorations, historical inquiries, sociological investigations, and theological systems) fail to explain adequately.

Through the Alter-Imperial paradigm, however, the Roman triumphal procession proves to be an informative ‘point of conversation’ that offers a new interpretation of the release of Satan. Specifically, Satan’s binding (20:1–2) and imprisonment (20:3) are only partially reversed in 20:7–10. Through divine ordinance and guidance (20:3b, 7b), Satan is released from his prison yet still in shackles (20:7). As the ancient serpent dramatizes his military defeat (20:8–9), he is marched in God’s triumphal procession which, like other triumphs, ends in the dragon’s execution (20:10). The Roman triumph, then, is not just an essential feature of the Flavian ‘foundational myth’ communicating central messages of the Roman sovereign narrative, but it is also a key ‘point of conversation’ through which subject texts like Revelation can interact with the empire.

Nevertheless, while this offers a lucid interpretation for a problematic text (Rev 20:7–10), it does not answer the overall question of the Alter-Imperial paradigm: How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire? It merely offers a new parallel to be considered. An additional step must be taken in order to answer this question and to demonstrate how the Alter-Imperial paradigm impacts the book of Revelation and Empire Studies as a whole.

Alter-Imperial Implications of Revelation 20:7–10: The Grammar of Rome and the Target of Eden

The common assumption that Revelation is an ‘anti-imperial’ document defuses serious analysis of the imagery in the Apocalypse, because it forces the conversation in one direction: subversion of the empire. At this point in the analysis, the Alter-Imperial paradigm could fall prey to the same temptation as other Empire Studies advocates and simply conclude that the use of Roman triumph imagery in Revelation 20:7–10 intends to subvert the Roman Empire. In other words, the use of a key Roman propaganda piece in Revelation’s subject text displays an anti-Roman intent for the entire document.¹ This

1 As J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), 62 asserts, “If Christians adapted signs and symbols

conclusion, however, overlooks the implementation of the imperial imagery in the release of Satan. In fact, the triumphal procession imagery in Revelation 20:7–10 reveals the key antagonist of the subject narrative: Satan. Not Rome.

Rome in Revelation

This shift from Rome to Satan as the primary enemy of the text challenges Revelation scholarship on multiple fronts. The anti-imperial assumption not only positions Rome as the central target of the Apocalypse (instead of Satan), but it also influences the interpretation of imagery throughout the entire book. Still further, the assumption and the interpretation(s) have a reciprocal relationship that leads to sweeping anti-imperial conclusions. The Alter-Imperial interpretation of Revelation 20:7–10, however, challenges Revelation scholarship to rethink the function of Rome throughout the Apocalypse.

For instance, the two beasts of Revelation 13 are broadly deciphered as follows: [1] the beast from the sea (13:1–8) represents the Roman Empire² and

from the Roman Empire and used them in exclusive worship of God and the Lamb, the borrowing was politically subversive.”

- 2 Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895), 336; Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (5d ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), 358–374, 418–426; R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 1:345–367; William Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904; repr., Grand Rapids: Hendrickson, 2001), 97; G.B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John* (BNTC 19; London: A&C Black, 1966; repr., Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 170–73; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 84–87; idem, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 182; Kraybill, *Apocalypse*, 23; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis & Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 148; Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 421; H.J. Holtzmann, *Briefe und Offenbarung des Johannes* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1893), 342; Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (NTD 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 78; Johannes Weiss, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1904), 142. Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 202 even states, “A beast arose from the sea, and commentators almost unanimously identify this beast with Roman hegemony. In fact, this Beast from the Sea symbolism borders on allegory” (cf. p. 159). J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (JSNTSup 132; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1996), 26, 170 and Collins, *Crisis*, 58–59, however, suggest that, in addition to the Roman Empire as a whole, the first beast could also refer to the emperor alone (cf. Fiorenza, *Justice*, 7). For the two beasts as the emperor Hadrian and Antonius Polemon, see Thomas Witulski, *Die Johannesoffenbarung*

[2] the beast from the earth (13:11–18) represents the imperial cult.³ This interpretation, however, impacts more than just the commentary of Revelation 13:1–18. As J. Nelson Kraybill argues, “The two beasts, which loom so large in John’s symbolic world, provide the key to understanding Revelation as a whole.”⁴ Indeed, the images of the two beasts as Rome—in conjunction with the beast in Revelation 17 and the destruction of the two beasts in Revelation 19—lead interpreters to conclusions about the Apocalypse as taking “a resistant stance”⁵ against “the oppressive power of the Roman Empire”⁶ that guides the reader to a “confrontation with Rome’s power and cult.”⁷ Nevertheless, the Alter-Imperial paradigm suggests that this conclusion reduces the message of the Apocalypse by overinflating the significance of Rome in Revelation 13 and throughout the rest of the text.

Three observations support this view. First, Rome as the fulfillment of the imagery of the two beasts is consistent with allusions to Daniel 7:1–7 in Revelation 13:1–8, but it does not adequately explain the modification of the Old Testament imagery in Revelation 13:11–18. The parallels between the first beast in Revelation 13:1–8 and the four beasts in Daniel 7:1–7 include: the beast in Revelation 13 originates from the sea (Rev 13:1; Dan 7:3); it has the same total of heads as the four beasts in Daniel 7;⁸ it has the same number of horns (Rev 13:1b; Dan 7:7b); it resembles a leopard (Rev 13:2; Dan 7:6), a bear (Rev 13:2; Dan 7:5), and a lion (Rev 13:2; Dan 7:4); it is given authority to rule (Rev 13:2b, 4, 5; Dan 7:6b) and it is connected to arrogant utterances (Rev 13:5, 6; Dan 7:8b, 11a); and it made war against God’s people and conquered them (Rev 13:7; Dan 7:19, 21).⁹ The obvious interdependence between these two

und Kaiser Hadrian: Studien zur Datierung der neutestamentlichen Apokalypse (FRLANT 221; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 219.

3 Kraybill, *Imperial*, 26; Friesen, *Imperial*, 159; Rowland, *Heaven*, 431–432; Kraybill, *Apocalypse*, 23, 147; Holtzmann, *Offenbarung*, 343; Lohse, *Offenbarung*, 77, 80–81; Weiss, *Offenbarung*, 141; Caird, *Revelation*, 171.

4 Kraybill, *Imperial*, 26.

5 Friesen, *Imperial*, 176.

6 Fiorenza, *Justice*, 4.

7 *Ibid.*, 188 (cf. pp. 4 and 187).

8 Rev 13:1b states that the first beast has “seven heads.” In Dan 7, three beasts have one head, while the third beast in Dan 7:6 has four heads, which totals ‘seven heads.’

9 See also the parallel between “forty-two months” in Rev 13:5 and “time, times and half a time” in Dan 7:25b.

texts has been widely recognized in Revelation scholarship,¹⁰ and it is these parallels that drive the conclusion that the beast from the sea represents the Roman Empire—given that Daniel 7:16b–17 states that the four beasts from the sea represent four successive empires.¹¹

If the beast imagery stopped in Revelation 13:1–8, then the conclusion that the beast from the sea represents Rome would be incontrovertible. Nevertheless, Revelation modifies the Danielic imagery to include a second beast from the earth (Rev 13:11–18). This unparalleled addition is traditionally explained through another Old Testament allusion to the Leviathan-Behemoth myth in Job 40–41.¹² Yet, as David E. Aune points out, this second Old Testament layer is more aesthetic than substantive:

These two beasts clearly reflect the Jewish myth of Leviathan, the female monster from the sea, and Behemoth, the male monster from the desert. Though this allusion provides a visionary framework for 12:18–13:18, the unity thereby imposed on the text unit is only superficial since important features of the Leviathan-Behemoth myth are omitted and replaced with motifs derived from the myth of the eschatological antagonist.¹³

In other words, the Leviathan-Behemoth myth offers parallel imagery of two beasts in Jewish literature in which one comes from the sea and the other

10 Friesen, *Imperial*, 175, 202; Rowland, *Heaven*, 13; Holtzmann, *Offenbarung*, 341–342; Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (HNT 16; Tübingen: Mohr, 1970), 110, 112; Lohse, *Offenbarung*, 78; Theodor Zahn, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (2 vols.; Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1924–1926), 450; Caird, *Revelation*, 160–163; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 244–247; Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 147–148; Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John* (BNTC 19; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006), 187; Brian K. Blount, *Revelation* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 243, 245–246; Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 1993), 182, 192–193; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation* (AB 38; Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), 218–220.

11 See also the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's parallel dream in Dan 2:36–43, in which each element of the large statue corresponds to the four successive kingdoms beginning with Babylon.

12 Friesen, *Imperial*, 175; Boxall, *Revelation*, 186–188; Bauckham, *Climax*, 186–192; Ford, *Revelation*, 210, 217–218; Holtzmann, *Offenbarung*, 343; Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 111–112, 116; Lohse, *Offenbarung*, 77; cf. Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse* (Boston: Beacon, 1963; repr., Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 49.

13 David E. Aune, *Revelation* (3 vols.; WBC 52A–52C; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997–1998), 2:728.

comes from the earth (although the gender of the beasts in Revelation 13 are unspecified), but it does not explain important questions like: If Rome is the sole referent for the beast imagery in Revelation 13, then why introduce a second beast at all? Why is the Leviathan-Behemoth parallel necessary if the author of Revelation wanted the imagery to center on the Roman Empire? Isn't Daniel 7 alone sufficient to accomplish this anti-imperial goal?

This intentional modification of Daniel 7 in Revelation 13 is not satisfied with an application to the Roman Empire alone. Indeed, the parallel to Daniel 7 conclusively points to an imperial connection with Rome, but the second beast modifies the imagery unnecessarily if the kingdom of Rome is the key target—for in Daniel's pattern, a second beast would indicate a second, successive kingdom, which no one argues for in Revelation 13. Thus, this modification suggests that there is not a one-to-one correlation between Daniel 7 and Revelation 13, although they are clearly related. While Rome is involved in the discussion in Revelation 13, it does not completely satisfy the nuances of the imagery or the intended message. Thus, Revelation 13 could simultaneously connect Rome to its overall point but still hold that the overall point stretches beyond Rome.

This possibility is supported by the second observation: the beast imagery throughout Revelation must be measured cumulatively.¹⁴ In Revelation 17:1–18, the imagery of the beast appears once again as a prominent feature in the text. Still described with the seven heads, ten horns, and covered with blasphemous names (Rev 17:3b; cf. 13:3), the beast from the sea in Revelation 13 is not connected with a second beast from the earth in this text but with a prostitute who is riding on the beast (17:3, 7). The text describes the prostitute as sitting on “seven hills” (17:9) and as “the great city having sovereignty over the kings of the earth” (17:18), which has led Revelation scholars to widely acknowledge her as a symbol for the Roman Empire.¹⁵

As Revelation 17:1 indicates, the purpose of this vision is to depict the destruction of the prostitute (17:16–17)—the Roman Empire.¹⁶ Significantly, the prostitute is brought to her ruin by “the beast and the ten horns,” who “make her

14 So Leonard Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 46; Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (HDR 9; Missoula: Scholars, 1976; repr., Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 170–171.

15 Kraybill, *Imperial*, 150, 159; Fiorenza, *Justice*, 75, 124; Holtzmann, *Offenbarung*, 349; Lohse, *Offenbarung*, 95–96; Weiss, *Offenbarung*, 23; Zahn, *Offenbarung*, 2:560; Mounce, *Revelation*, 315; Caird, *Revelation*, 216; Blount, *Revelation*, 319; Boxall, *Revelation*, 245. Cf. Rowland, *Heaven*, 403.

16 Friesen, *Imperial*, 141.

naked,” “eat her flesh,” and “burn her with fire” (17:16). This graphic depiction of her defeat, followed by an elaboration of Rome’s defeat in Revelation 18, surfaces an awkward tension in the interpretation of Rome in Revelation’s imagery—how can Rome be both the prostitute (the one destroyed) and the beast (the one destroying) in this imagery? As Kraybill uncomfortably summarizes, “the ‘beast [the Empire] will hate the whore [Rome].”¹⁷

Accentuating the distinction between the prostitute and the beast, the eschatological onslaught launched by the beast and the ten horns against the Lamb and his “faithful followers” (17:12–14) seems to indicate that the ministry of the beast extends beyond the destruction of the prostitute. Still further, the destruction of the beast and the false prophet are reserved for a completely separate account in Revelation 19:11–21, which is separated from the destruction of Babylon (Rome) in Revelation 18¹⁸ and the destruction of Satan in Revelation 20:7–10. This cumulative picture of the beast(s) in Revelation 13, 17, and 19 indicates that while the image is associated with Rome, it is not exhausted in Rome. Indeed, the beast is intentionally distinguished from Rome in its ministry and defeat, which is extended and supported by the third observation: Revelation purposefully connects figures of good and evil in deliberate pairings.¹⁹

The pairings communicated through “homologies and contrarities,”²⁰ or parallels and parodies, bring into greater clarity the placement of Rome in the book of Revelation and, on some level, govern the interpretative possibilities for imagery referents to the Roman Empire. Revelation scholars commonly recognize that the beast from the sea (Rev 13:1–8) is paired with Jesus in similar and contrasting depictions that include:²¹ the presence of horns (Rev 13:1b; cf. 5:6b); the possession of diadems (13:1b; cf. 19:12a); the inscription of a name

17 Kraybill, *Imperial*, 150. See also Kraybill, *Imperial*, 159; idem, *Apocalypse*, 129.

18 Kraybill, *Imperial*, 163–164; Friesen, *Imperial*, 188; Caird, *Revelation*, 216; Holtzmann, *Offenbarung*, 351; Lohse, *Offenbarung*, 95, 99; Weiss, *Offenbarung*, 119–120; Zahn, *Offenbarung*, 2:575–578; Mounce, *Revelation*, 322–326; Boxall, *Revelation*, 254–256; Blount, *Revelation*, 324–331; Charles, *Revelation*, 2:95–102; Bauckham, *Climax*, 338–383; Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 123. Intriguingly, Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 150, although ultimately denying Rome’s connection to Babylon (p. 151), draws a linguistic connection between Rev 18:12 and the Flavian Roman triumph (Josephus, *J.W.* 7.5.4) through the word σιρικός (‘silk’).

19 Thompson, *Revelation*, 87 refers to these pairings as “dyads.” For a great discussion of the definition of ‘boundaries’ in Revelation, see Thompson, *Revelation*, 75–86.

20 Friesen, *Imperial*, 162; Thompson, *Revelation*, 89–90.

21 Friesen, *Imperial*, 162; Collins, *Combat Myth*, 186; Thompson, *Revelation*, 40; Fiorenza, *Justice*, 54–55, 171, 181; Rowland, *Heaven*, 517 (n. 88); Holtzmann, *Offenbarung*, 342; Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 111; Lohse, *Offenbarung*, 78; Zahn, *Offenbarung*, 2:451; Caird,

(13:1b; cf. 19:12b); the reception of authority (13:2b; cf. 5:7); the recipient of worship (13:4, 8; cf. 5:8, 9–10, 12, 13); the leader in war (13:7; 19:19; cf. 19:11, 15); and, the most conspicuous parallel, the (apparent) death and resurrection motif (13:3; cf. 1:5a, 18; 5:6a; 13:8).

Similarly, the Spirit of God in Revelation parallels the beast from the earth: as the second beast is intimately connected to the first beast (13:12a; 13:15), the Spirit is intimately connected to the Son (5:6; 19:10; 22:6); as the second beast practices a ministry of proclamation (13:13–14; 16:13; 19:20; 20:10), the Spirit practices a ministry of proclamation (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:1, 6, 13, 22; 22:17); as the second beast leads humanity to worship the agents of evil (13:12, 14b, 15), the Spirit leads humanity to worship the agents of good (1:10; 4:2, 5; 21:10).²² In Revelation, both the Spirit of God and the beast from the earth function as a key connection between humanity and divinity—neither receiving worship, but both connecting humanity to contexts of worship through their ministries that proclaim the glory of the previous dyad (the beast from the sea and the Son) as well as a third pairing: the ‘one on the throne’ (God the Father) and the dragon (Satan).

The actions of the first two dyads are directly connected to the authority and aims of the third pairing. In Revelation 13:1, Satan stands on the shore and, by his authority, summons the beast from the sea. Satan gives all of his authority to the beast (13:2b) and even allows the beast to be worshipped by humanity alongside of the dragon (13:4)—who also has seven heads, ten horns, and diadems (12:3; cf. 13:1b). The dragon’s authority is used by the beast from the sea to continue to make war (13:7; cf. 12:7, 17)²³ against God and his followers through slander (13:6; cf. 12:8–9, 10b, 12b) and physical dominance (13:7, 10; cf. 12:4b, 7–8, 17).²⁴ The ministry of the beast from the earth—who has the voice of a dragon (13:11b)—does not just connect humanity to worship of the first

Revelation, 172; Bauckham, *Climax*, 431–441; Blount, *Revelation*, 247–249; Boxall, *Revelation*, 188.

22 A possible connection between the second beast and the Spirit occurs in Rev 11:11 and 13:15 through a wordplay. In both verses, the word πνεῦμα is used in connection with bringing something to life—the two witnesses (11:11) and the image of the first beast (13:15).

23 The noun πόλεμος is used eight times, and every time it is in connection with evil (9:9; 11:7; 12:7, 17; 13:7; 16:14; 19:19; 20:8). The verb πολεμέω, however, is used for both good (2:16; 12:7a; 19:11) and evil (12:7b; 13:4; 17:14). Cf. Collins, *Combat Myth*, 29.

24 In addition, both Satan (2:9) and the beast from the sea (13:1, 5, 6) are linguistically connected with the word βλασφημία.

beast, but also completes the triad of evil in Revelation by perpetuating the aims of the dragon (13:15b, 16–17) through the authority of the dragon (13:12).

Likewise, in the triad of good, the Father holds a sealed scroll in his right hand (5:1) that no one can open (5:3) until the emergence of the Son, who appears as a slain lamb (5:5–6, 7, 9). The authority of the Father is extended to the Son (2:26–27) in the imagery through parallel titles,²⁵ shared worship,²⁶ and depictions of both reigning on the throne in heaven.²⁷ This authority is used by the Son to bring resolution to the rebellious (2:4–5, 14–16, 20–23; 3:1b–3, 15–20; 6:12–17; 19:11–21) and transformation to the faithful (1:5–6; 2:10b, 17b, 26–27; 3:12, 21; 5:9–10; 7:14b–15; 20:4–6), both of which are direct attacks on aims of the triad of evil. Like the beast from the earth, the ministry of the Spirit, then, connects humanity to worship of the Son (and the Father) and completes the triad of good in Revelation by perpetuating the authority and aims of the Father—for in Revelation, worship is war.²⁸

The articulation of the cosmic triads, however, does not complete the pairings evident in the text. Indeed, in Revelation, both triads collect a group of followers—the triad of evil through deception (12:9; 13:14; 16:13; 19:20; 20:8, 10; cf. 2:20) and the triad of good through sacrifice (1:4–6; 5:9–10; 7:14–15)—that functions as the human manifestation of the respective triad. To emphasize the connection, the group of followers reflects the triad to whom they belong

25 Alpha and Omega—Rev 1:8; 22:6 (the Father) and 22:13 (the Son); Beginning and End—Rev 22:6 (the Father) and 22:13 (the Son). The Son is also referred to in the parallel title ‘First and the Last’ in Rev 1:17 and 22:13. In addition, Rev 1:14 depicts the ‘one like a son of man’ (Rev 1:13; cf. Dan 7:13) with hair “white like wool,” which is reminiscent of the description of the Ancient of Days on the throne in Dan 7:9.

26 The same heavenly agents that worship God the Father in Rev 4 (i.e., the four living creatures—4:6b–8 and the twenty-four elders—4:10–11) worship the Son in Revelation 5 both alone (5:8–10) and together with the Father (5:13b–14). This is in addition to the worship of the Lamb by a multitude of angels that worship him (5:11–12), the great multitude in heaven (7:9–10—worship of both the Father and the Son), and all of creation in heaven and on earth (5:13).

27 God the Father is introduced as sitting on the throne in heaven in Rev 4:2–6a, and the Son is introduced as the slain Lamb “standing in the midst of the throne” in Rev 5:6. See also Rev 3:21; 7:9, 10, 17; 22:3.

28 Rev 8:1–5; 13:4, 8, 12, 15; 14:7, 9, 11; 15:4; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4b. See also Friesen, *Imperial*, 176, 209; Thompson, *Revelation*, 53–73.

in their appearance,²⁹ actions,³⁰ and even in their seal of allegiance³¹—the bride of Christ, that is the New Jerusalem (the Church), reflects the cosmic triad of good (God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit) and the prostitute, that is Babylon (the Roman Empire), reflects the cosmic triad of evil (the dragon, the beast from the sea, and the beast from the earth). This intimacy is evident, for instance, in the actions of physical and non-physical persecution by Roman society (Jews and Romans alike) attributed to Satan (the leader of the triad of evil) in Revelation 2 and 3 with phrases like: “I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison” (2:10); “I know where you live—where Satan has his throne” (2:13); “I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan” (2:9; cf. 3:9).³² As Leonard Thompson observes,

In the process of nesting or extending the environment through metaphors and homologues nothing is left behind. Minor local issues do not drop out as the seer moves to global and cosmic environments; rather, they are taken up into the cosmic. Everything—local, global, animal, vegetable, mineral, divine—keeps its own place as it is taken into a larger unified system or ordered world.³³

In the Apocalypse, then, the cosmic triads are intricately interwoven into the existence of their followers, although they remain distinguishable images.

Although the overall purpose of these pairings is to accentuate the “sharp contrasts” between the two groups in order to exhort the audience “to decide for one or the other,”³⁴ the dyads also directly impact the interpretation of the

29 For example, the prostitute in Rev 17:4 and Babylon in 18:16 are dressed in the color κόκκινος, which is the color of the beast in 17:3 (cf. 18:12), and the bride of the Lamb (21:9b) brilliantly shines like jasper, which is reminiscent of the appearance of the one on the throne in Rev 4:3 who also radiates like jasper.

30 So the followers of the triad of evil blaspheme (16:9, 11, 21; 17:3; cf. 2:9; 13:1, 5, 6) and deceive (2:20; 18:23; cf. 12:9; 13:14; 19:20; 20:8, 10), and the followers of the triad of good sacrifice (2:13; 13:10; 17:16; cf. 1:5, 18; 5:9) and bear witness (2:13; 17:6; cf. 1:5; 3:14).

31 The followers of the triad of evil receive the χάραγμα of the beast on their foreheads (13:16–17; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20; cf. 20:4), and the followers of the triad of good receive the σφραγίς of God on their foreheads (7:2; 9:4; 14:1).

32 Collins, *Crisis*, 152 writes, “Likewise, the fear of the hearers is not denied or minimized. On the contrary, it is intensified. The hostile Jews and Roman authorities are not just ill-disposed human beings, but they have all the power of Satan on their side.” Cf. Friesen, *Imperial*, 188; Fiorenza, *Justice*, 54, 68.

33 Thompson, *Revelation*, 6.

34 Thompson, *Revelation*, 81. See also Fiorenza, *Justice*, 171, 181; Friesen, *Imperial*, 162.

beasts in Revelation 13 as Rome. To be sure, the Roman Empire and the imperial cult are connected to the beasts in that Rome is the human conduit of the cosmic triad of evil; therefore, it is appropriate and even expected to see reflections of Rome in the imagery of the triad of evil. Yet, it would be remiss to reduce two-thirds of the cosmic triad of evil (the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth) down to the geographically and chronologically located group of followers—Rome. In other words, these pairings reveal that to regard Rome as ‘pure, self-sacrificial, and benevolent’ (a follower of the triad of good) is just as inaccurate as overinflating Rome’s significance in usurpation of the triad of evil. In Revelation, Rome is categorized as a dispensable follower rather than a member of the cosmic triad of evil itself.

The Battle is Bigger than Rome

Overall, these three observations challenge the anti-imperial assumption that sees Rome as the central target in Revelation 13 and throughout the rest of the Apocalypse. In Revelation 13, the intentional modification of the imagery in Daniel 7:1–7, with the inclusion of the second beast, is explained in the cumulative picture of the beast that follows. Indeed, in Revelation 17:1–18 and 19:11–21, the imagery distinguishes Rome from the beast in the depiction, duration, and destruction of each entity. Additionally, the good and evil pairings throughout the Apocalypse bring further clarity to the relationship of Rome and the beast imagery. The triad of good (God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit) and its followers (the bride/New Jerusalem—the Church) parallel the triad of evil (Satan, the beast from the sea, and the beast from the earth) and its followers (the prostitute/Babylon—the Roman Empire), which subordinates Rome to the cosmic imagery of the beast. Thus, to reduce Revelation’s primary target down to Rome is to miss the key antagonist completely. For in Revelation, Satan is *not* dependent on Rome for success, but Rome *is* dependent on Satan for its authority and prosperity.³⁵

In fact, for the triad of evil, Rome is dispensable (Rev 17:16–18). The moniker Babylon for Rome (Rev 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21; cf. 14:8; 16:19) invokes connections of imperial dominance over the people of God (Ps 137:1–4; Isa 39:6–7; Jer 20:4–6; 21:2–10; 22:25; 24:1; 27:6–9; Ezek 17:12; 24:2; Dan 1:1–2) and even the destruction of the temple (2 Kgs 25:8–15; Jer 39:8; 50:28; Dan 1:1–2). In addition, the ‘Babylon’ parallel contains an emphatic proclamation of the kingdom’s destruction (Isa 13:19; 14:4, 22; 21:9; 39:1; 43:14; 48:14; Jer 25:12; etc.), and yet, an often

35 *Contra* Friesen, *Imperial*, 188 who states, “Once Roman hegemony is destroyed, Satan himself is confined for a thousand years so that he will not deceive the nations (20:3, τὰ ἔθνη).”

overlooked detail of this imagery is that the destruction of Babylon only signals its replacement by another empire, another prostitute.

The proclamation of Babylon's replacement in Daniel 5:28 is visually depicted in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2:31–40 as well as Daniel's vision in Daniel 7:1–7.³⁶ In each visualization, the currently reigning Babylon is the initial empire—the head of gold (Dan 2:38b) and the lion/eagle beast (Dan 7:4). Nonetheless, each vision emphasizes the dispensable nature of Babylon in that the mighty kingdom is replaced by three successive empires after its destruction (Dan 2:39, 40; 7:5, 6, 7, 16b–17). In other words, Babylon—like Sodom, Egypt, and others—is just another kingdom in a long line of kingdoms that are destroyed and *replaced*. The use of this image in Revelation, then, emphasizes that Rome does not just parallel Babylon's victories but also its dispensability—for the war is bigger than Rome.

Similarly, the Old Testament monikers for the false teachers in Revelation 2–3 contain, on a smaller scale, the same emphasis of the dispensable nature of the human agents for the cosmic triad of evil. The false prophets in the churches of Asia Minor are more recent iterations of the Satanic deception found in the proclamations of Jezebel (Rev 2:20; cf. 1 Kgs 16:29–33; 19:1–2; 21:5–23, 25; 2 Kgs 9:22), Balaam (Rev 2:14; cf. Num 31:16; Deut 23:4; Josh 13:22; 24:9–10; Neh 13:2), and others (Rev 2:6, 15; cf. Ezek 13:15b–16; Jer 20:6; 23:25; 29:21) used by the triad of evil to war against the triad of good and its followers. The prophets, like Rome, are dispensable for the triad of evil in this ongoing battle.

Still further, the saturation of the Apocalypse in Old Testament allusions suggests that the key enemy in this battle is trans-geographical and trans-generational (outside of space and time),³⁷ which emerges in the use of Jezebel, Balaam, Sodom, Babylon, and Egypt to refer to present opposition.³⁸ Thus, the hermeneutical avenue of the Seer's expression (the Old Testament) does not allow us to reduce the complete application of the battle down to something in space and time alone (i.e., Rome). In other words, Revelation is inundated with the Old Testament not because the imagery is merely analogous to Revelation's present situation, but because it is a continuation of the same battle against the same key antagonist: "the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan" (Rev 20:2b; cf. 12:9).³⁹ This battle began before Rome existed and will

36 See also Isa 45:1; Jer 50:27–33; 51:20–23.

37 Thompson, *Revelation*, 63–64, 75–76, 85; Friesen, *Imperial*, 135–166.

38 Cf. Lohmeyer, *Offenbarung*, 151.

39 Anatheia E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 75, 77; Thompson, *Revelation*, 83.

continue after Rome has fallen, because the battle is bigger than Rome—for *Satan* is the chief enemy leader in God's triumphal procession (Rev 20:7–10).

This conclusion, however, does not suggest that Revelation is indifferent or affirming towards Rome. Indeed, given the relationship between Satan and Rome in the Apocalypse, in Revelation 20:7–10 there is an *indirect* anti-Roman element. Thus, to destroy the dragon who is sovereign over the triad of evil (Rev 13:2b, 7, 11–12, 15) attacks Rome's source of power and authority in Revelation. Nevertheless, a tangential negative by-product of a much larger event is hardly equivalent to an anti-imperial intent for the entirety of the document.⁴⁰ Instead, Satan's role in God's triumphal procession affirms the picture developed throughout the rest of the Apocalypse: Rome is not the key antagonist in the subject narrative.

In the middle of physical and non-physical persecution, the identity of the true target in the war can be easily misconstrued. The imagery of the Apocalypse, though, clarifies the central enemy for the Christians in Asia Minor, because if the enemy is unknown or unclear, then it heightens the possibility of unwitting compromise or fighting the wrong battle in the wrong way and missing the essential target. So Revelation blurs the lines of the old and present manifestations of the evil triad's attack to emphasize the key enemy in the battle: Satan.⁴¹

With the triumphal procession parallel in Revelation 20:7–10, the most potent Roman imagery is reserved not for the empire, but for the antagonist of Eden (20:2). From the Alter-Imperial perspective, Rome is simply too small a target to deserve mention in God's triumphal procession. In other words, to suggest an anti-Roman intent in the triumphal procession imagery in Revelation 19:11–20:10 or throughout the entirety of the document is to oversimplify the message by over-exaggerating the Roman Empire. Thus, an anti-imperial approach regionalizes what for Revelation is cosmic.

The Alter-Imperial Revelation

From an Alter-Imperial perspective, the book of Revelation does not reflect an anti-imperial intent with the destruction of Rome as its goal; instead, the

40 *Contra* Friesen, *Imperial*, 213 who calls the Roman Empire “[Revelation’s] chosen adversary,” and concludes, “In John’s system, then, there was no legitimate place for earthly empire. . . . John was not just anti-Roman; he was anti-empire” (p. 208). See also Fiorenza, *Justice*, 124.

41 Even Friesen, *Imperial*, 169 refers to Satan as “the major cosmic antagonist of Revelation.”

Apocalypse uses imperial imagery to reveal the key antagonist (Satan) *and* to construct the ‘alter-empire’ of the triad of good.⁴² This recent iteration of the ancient battle does not merely replicate the exact same story of ‘God vs. Satan’ reflected in the Old Testament allusions. As the first chapter of the Apocalypse indicates, this is a “revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:1) whose victory at the cross not only constructs an alter-empire but provides it with the politics of conquest in this cosmic war.⁴³

The Construction of the Alter-Empire

The creation of the alter-empire dominates the imagery of the first chapter and resonates throughout the rest of the Apocalypse. The triad of good is collectively revealed to the audience (1:4a) in Revelation 1:4b–5a: “Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is coming, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.” This initial depiction of the triad of good introduces the group’s identifying grammar⁴⁴ and directs

42 In this context, the word ‘construct’ (and ‘create’) indicates: building what does not exist, repairing what has fallen into disrepair, and fortifying what remains. Therefore, the construction of the alter-empire does not envision simply the creation of something brand new, but instead, calls to “overcome” or “strengthen what remains” also fall into the category of ‘construct.’ Additionally, the verb tense ‘constructs’ (or ‘creates’) is intentionally ambiguous to preserve the past, present, and future actions that contribute to the overall ‘construction.’ As Thompson, *Revelation*, 85 indicates about the cross in Revelation, “There is a permanence to the crucified Lamb that cannot be captured by locating the crucifixion in time, for example ‘under Pontius Pilate’ or ‘in the first century of the Common Era.’ To put it differently, the crucifixion is much more than a momentary event in history. That permanence is captured in the Book of Revelation through spatial, not temporal, imagery. The ‘slain Lamb’ appears not only on earth but also in heaven, close to the throne (5:6). The Lamb was not slain at a particular moment in time; rather the Lamb was slain before time. The seer describes that time in spatial language: the Lamb was slain ‘from the foundation of the world’ (13:8, cf. 17:8). The crucifixion is enfolded in the ‘deep,’ permanent structures of the seer’s vision, and it unfolds in the life of Jesus and those who are his faithful followers.”

43 While Fiorenza, *Justice*, 4 does advocate Jesus as the one “who has created an alternative reign and community,” she reduces the target in the following phrase from Satan down to “the Roman Empire.”

44 So: “who is, and who was, and who is to come”—1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5 (cf. 17:8, 9, 11); “seven spirits”—1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6 (see also 1:10; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 4:2; 14:13; 17:3; 19:10; 21:10; 22:17); “the throne”—1:4; 3:21; 4:2 [2x], 3, 4 [3x], 5 [2x], 6 [3x], 9, 10 [2x]; 5:1, 6, 7, 11, 13; 6:16; 7:9, 10, 11 [2x], 15 [2x], 17; 8:3; 12:5; 14:3; 16:17; 19:4, 5; 20:11, 12; 21:3, 5; 22:1, 3 (cf. 2:13; 13:2; 16:10); “the faithful witness”—1:5; 3:14 (see also 2:13; 11:3; 17:6); “firstborn of the dead”—1:5, 18; 2:8

the reader's attention to the triad's collective purpose: the construction of an alter-empire.

Indeed, Revelation 1:5b–6a proclaims, “To the one loving us and having released us from our sins by his blood, and he made [ἐποίησεν] us into a kingdom—priests for his God and Father.”⁴⁵ The juxtaposition of the terms “kingdom” and “priests”⁴⁶ alludes to the declaration by God on Sinai (Exod 19:3–6) that if the people of Israel, recently freed from their bondage in Egypt (19:4), submit to God's covenant and sovereignty (19:5), then God pronounces that “from among all nations you shall be a treasured possession to me. Although all the earth is mine, you shall be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (19:5b–6).⁴⁷ This Old Testament connection, then, invokes a context in which the liberating acts of God create an alter-empire (a ‘holy nation’). So in Revelation 1:4–6 the triad of good is introduced and linked to the exodus-event found in the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross that creates a “kingdom and priests,” an alter-empire.

(cf. 3:1; “the ruler of the kings of the earth”—1:5; 15:3; 17:14; 19:16 (cf. 6:15; 16:14; 17:2, 18; 18:3, 9; 19:19; 21:24).

45 Fiorenza, *Justice*, 72 states, “The verb *poiein* . . . refers here to concrete persons who are given a new dignity, it should probably be understood in the sense of ‘investing’ or ‘installing’ someone. The usage of *poiein* in this sense is not found in classical Greek, but in the LXX and in the NT, *Kai epoiēsen* is so used in Mark 3:14–19 where it refers to the institution of the twelve (‘And *he appointed* twelve’), and in Acts 2:36, where it refers to the investiture of Jesus as Lord and Messiah by God. The closest parallel to Rev 1:6 is, however, found in 1 Sam 12:6; 1 Kings 12:31 and 13:33–34, where the aorist *epoiēsen* is also used in connection with the accusative of *hierēis*. Both OT texts emphasize that in the Northern Kingdom every member of the nation could be installed by Jeroboam as a priest without having to come from the Levitical tribe. Thus Rev 1:6 maintains that Christ installed the redeemed to kingship, to be priests for God, the Father.” For a good discussion on Rev 1:4–6, see Fiorenza, *Justice*, 70–73.

46 The Greek construction of these terms in Rev 1:6 (καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ) differs from the LXX of Exod 19:6 (ὅμεις δὲ ἔσεσθέ μοι βασιλεῖον ἱεράτευμα καὶ ἔθνος ἁγίον) and the MT (וְאַתֶּם יְהוָה יִקְרְאוּנִי מְמַלְכֵת מִלְּיָדֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), all of which differ from the parallel reference in Rev 5:10 (καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτοῦ τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς). However, the translation of all three parallel each other in that [1] God (or Jesus) initiates the formation of the people [2] into a kingdom [3] composed of, characterized as, or manifested through the actions of priests (or a priesthood). As a result, in what follows, the phrase ‘kingdom and priests’ will be used to reference the parallel as a whole and yet does not ignore the linguistic nuances of each reference.

47 See also 1 Pet 2:5. Ford, *Revelation*, 378; Caird, *Revelation*, 17; Mounce, *Revelation*, 49–50; Boxall, *Revelation*, 33–34; Blount, *Revelation*, 37; Charles, *Revelation*, 1:16–17; Bauckham, *Climax*, 327–329.

Allusions to Daniel 7 in Revelation 1 emphasize the same 'kingdom construction' theme through the identity and actions of Jesus. After the four beasts in Daniel 7:1–7, the vision shifts its attention in Daniel 7:9, "As I continued to watch, thrones were placed and the Ancient of Days was seated. His clothing was white like snow and the hair of his head was pure white like wool. His throne was like a flame of fire and its wheels burning fire." After witnessing the multitudes standing before the throne (7:10) and the destruction of the fourth beast (7:11–12), Daniel sees "coming upon the clouds of heaven, one like a son of man" approaching the Ancient of Days (7:13). The vision reaches its climax in 7:14 with the proclamation of his kingdom: "[The one like a son of man] was given dominion and glory and sovereignty. And all peoples, nations and languages glorified him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not cease, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."

Building on this imagery, Revelation 1 presents Jesus as the "one like a son of man" (Rev 1:13; cf. Dan 7:13) with hair "white like wool" (Rev 1:14a; cf. Dan 7:9b) as "white as snow" (Rev 1:14b; cf. Dan 7:9b) with "his eyes like a flame of fire" (Rev 1:14b; cf. Dan 7:9b).⁴⁸ Thus, the Danielic images of the "Ancient of Days" and the "one like a son of man" are blurred together in the disclosure of Jesus on Patmos. These connections adjoin not just the characters of the two contexts, but also the intended actions of the figures: the construction of an alter-empire.

As Daniel 7:14 depicts the sovereignty of the "one like a son of man" who secures "everlasting dominion" for his indestructible kingdom, Revelation portrays the sovereignty of Jesus attained through the suffering on the cross which created an alter-empire. So Revelation 1:5 connects Jesus' authoritative appellation "the ruler of the kings of the earth" with his designation as "the faithful witness" who was "the firstborn of the dead." Similarly, Revelation 1:17b–18 declares Jesus' sovereignty over "death and Hades" after the crucifixion/resurrection summary, "I was dead, but look, I am alive for ever and ever."⁴⁹ Revelation 5:12 pronounces that Jesus is worthy to "receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing" precisely because he is the "Lamb who was slain."⁵⁰ So, as discussed in chapter 6 above, the sovereign power of the rider on the white horse in Revelation 19:11–21 deliberately

48 Compare also the 'coming with the clouds' imagery in Rev 1:7 and Dan 7:13.

49 See also Rev 2:8; 3:14.

50 See also Rev 5:9a.

rests in the context of his “robe dipped in blood” (Rev 19:13). The sacrifice secures the sovereignty.⁵¹

In Revelation, the paradoxical sovereignty attained through suffering creates an alter-empire. Parallel to Revelation 1:5b–6, the sacrifice of Jesus creates a “kingdom and priests” in Revelation 5:9–10:

And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God ones from every tribe and tongue and people and nation [Dan 7:14]. And you have made them into a kingdom and priests [Exod 19:6] for our God, and they will be sovereign on the earth.”⁵²

The sacrifice, then, secures sovereignty *and* creates an alter-empire. Even in the new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:1), the triad of good’s sovereignty is connected to the imagery of the sacrificial Lamb of Revelation 5 (Rev 21:27; 22:3), who provides (21:22–23; 22:1) and protects (21:1b, 12, 25, 27) for the alter-empire (21:9; 21:14) which in turn serves (priests)⁵³ and reigns (kingdom) with the triad of good “for ever and ever” (22:5). Throughout the entire book, therefore, sovereignty and sacrifice converge in Jesus who constructs a ‘kingdom and priests.’

The Politics of Conquest for the Alter-Empire

As mentioned above, the Apocalypse describes the followers of each triad in imagery that corresponds to the triad to whom they belong. So blasphemy and deception are as intricate to the followers of the triad of evil as sacrifice and witness are to the followers of the triad of good.⁵⁴ Unsurprisingly, then, Revelation 1:9 states, “I, John, your brother and co-partner in the *suffering* and *kingdom* and *patient endurance* in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos due to

51 Thompson, *Revelation*, 65, 189; Fiorenza, *Justice*, 121; Friesen, *Imperial*, 200; Rowland, *Heaven*, 434. For Justin Martyr’s discussion on Rome’s ironic use of the cross as a symbol of power, see Laura Salah Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture: The Second-Century Church Amid the Spaces of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2010), 167–168.

52 Commenting on Rev 5:9–10, Thompson, *Revelation*, 59 concurs, “The messianic king gains victory through his death, and as a result he redeems and creates from all peoples a new, ‘Christian’ people, an international community of kings and priests (political and religious elements combine here also) who will reign upon earth.” See also Thompson, *Revelation*, 70.

53 In 22:3, the term for ‘serve’ is the cultic ritual term λατρεύω.

54 See Thompson, *Revelation*, 78.

the word of God and the *witness* of Jesus.”⁵⁵ The kingdom that John espouses reflects “suffering” and “patient endurance”—which correspond to the sovereignty of the triad of good attained through the sacrifice of Jesus—as a part of the call to “witness” as the Lamb “witnessed” (Rev 1:2, 5). In other words, in Revelation, Jesus’ sacrifice (“suffering” and “patient endurance”) does not just create the existence of the ‘kingdom’ alone, but also the politics of conquest (“witness”) for the alter-empire.

At the core of the alter-empire in the Apocalypse is the motif of ‘conquest.’ As the agents of evil attempt to conquer the agents of good (Rev 6:2; 11:7), the churches of Asia Minor are persistently summoned to arms with the phrase “the one conquering (ὁ νικῶν).”⁵⁶ Whether rebellious or faithful, all of the churches in Asia Minor are addressed in the language of conquest. So the “song of the Lamb” (15:3)⁵⁷ is sung by “the ones conquering the beast” (15:2—τοὺς νικῶντας) and “the one conquering” (21:7—ὁ νικῶν) inherits the “new heaven and the new earth” (21:1). Correspondingly, this conquest is both possible and congruent with the depiction of Jesus as the “Lion of the tribe of Judah” (5:5) who “conquered” (5:5—ἐνίκησεν) through his sacrifice as the slain Lamb (5:6).⁵⁸ Indeed, the political end of Revelation, linguistically and pictorially, is “the kingdom of the world became the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall be sovereign for ever and ever” (11:15b).⁵⁹

With conquest as a central feature of the Apocalypse, the methodological question of ‘How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?’ may shift to a related (but separate) question: How does Revelation *call the church* to

55 *Emphasis* added. See also Rev 20:4–6 where the “souls of those who had been beheaded because of their witness for Jesus” sit in a position of sovereignty on “thrones” (20:4, 6) and reign with Christ.

56 The phrase ὁ νικῶν (“the one conquering”) is used in 2:11, 26; 3:5, 12, 21 and the phrase τῷ νικῶντι (“to the one conquering”) is used in 2:7, 17.

57 Rev 15:3 also mentions the “song of Moses,” which includes an allusion to Exod 15:1–18—a passage in the context of conquest. In this account, due to the parting of the Red Sea, Moses and the Israelites marched on the dry ground of the sea in their Exodus from Egypt. Before the conquest of the Egyptian army in Exod 15:19, Moses and the Israelites sang a song of victory in which God is exalted because of his actions of liberation. Similar to Rev 15:4, Exod 15:11 exclaims, “Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, doing wonders?” (NRSV)

58 See also Rev 17:12–14 where the Lamb “will conquer” (17:14b—νικῆσει) the beast from the sea and the ten kings who “make war” (17:14a).

59 See also Rev 1:7; 5:9; 7:9; 14:6 (cf. 11:9; 13:7), 14–20; 18:21–24; 19:11–21; 21:8.

interact with the Roman Empire?⁶⁰ This latter question posits the existence of an alter-empire (of sorts) and acknowledges the goal of 'conquest,' but the mode or form of the politics attaining conquest over evil becomes a key point of contention. More specifically, if an anti-imperial intent of Revelation is assumed, in which Rome is the central target for the conquest, then destructive conclusions emerge that present awkward tensions within the text as a whole.

The anti-imperial assumption in Revelation manifests itself in comments like, "John's vitriolic attack upon Rome,"⁶¹ "[John's] fierce anti-Roman stance,"⁶² or "a purely negative attitude towards [Rome] . . . is put uncompromisingly in the apocalypse of John."⁶³ From this vantage point, the purpose of the Apocalypse is intricately interwoven into the destruction of the Roman Empire. As Adela Yarbro Collins muses, "the overall tone of Revelation suggests that John would rather have seen conflict between Rome and Christians intensified than abated."⁶⁴ Thus, the anti-imperial assumption, in which the destruction of Rome is the political end, logically concludes that "In John's

60 This latter question is prominent in the studies by Brian K. Blount, *Can I Get a Witness?: Reading Revelation through African American Culture* (Louisville: John Knox, 2005); Kraybill, *Apocalypse*; Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness* (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade Books, 2011); Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse* (New York: Seabury, 1977); Mark Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace: A Nonviolent Christology in the Book of Revelation* (Waynesboro, Ga.: Paternoster, 2003); Allan A. Boesak, *Comfort and Protest: The Apocalypse from a South African Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987); cf. Thomas Söding, "Heilig, heilig, heilig: Zur politischen Theologie der Johannes-Apokalypse," *ZTK* 96.1 (1999): 49, 76; Gerhard Maier, *Die Johannesoffenbarung und die Kirche* (WUNT 25; Tübingen: Mohr, 1981), 621.

61 Kraybill, *Imperial*, 196. See also Kraybill, *Apocalypse*, 50.

62 Collins, *Crisis*, 47.

63 Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 257 [quoted in Thompson, *Revelation*, 16]. Also, Friesen, *Imperial*, 211 states, "My contention that Revelation is an anti-imperial text meshes well with liberation interpretations of the Apocalypse . . ."

64 Collins, *Crisis*, 124. Fiorenza, *Justice*, 6–7 summarizes Collins, "In her [A.Y. Collins] discussion of vengeance and persecution in Rev and especially of the 'thorough-going and violent attack on Rome' (Rev 18) she points to the possibility that Rev today can function as an outlet for envy, hatred, resentment, vengefulness, and aggression of the weak against the strong. Its only positive function may be that it could serve 'as a reminder to the privileged that the system which benefits them may be causing real hardship to others'" [citing Adela Yarbro Collins, "Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World*, 729–49, esp. 746–47]. Cf. Maier, *Johannesoffenbarung*, 620–621.

world, Christians should seek out clashes with the state.”⁶⁵ If Rome is the key antagonist, then the politics of conquest necessitates a call to violence against Rome or anti-imperial actions that contribute to the empire’s demise, the perceived goal of the document.

Yet Revelation calls the churches to reflect the politics of conquest displayed in the triad of good: sacrificial non-violence. Revelation 1:5 designates Jesus as the “faithful witness” because of his sacrificial death that secures the sovereignty needed for conquest (see also Rev 3:14; 19:11). While this paradoxical sovereignty creates an alter-empire, it also redefines the form by which victory is attained—the necessary mode of the alter-empire’s politics of conquest. The ‘faithful’ (πιστός) follower(s) of the triad of good throughout Revelation is the witness (μάρτυς) to a testimony (μαρτυρία) interwoven with depictions of his or her own suffering and sacrifice. Thus, John is exiled on the island of Patmos because of the “testimony (μαρτυρίαν) of Jesus” (Rev 1:9), and the Christians of Smyrna are exhorted to “be faithful (πιστός) until death” with the promise of the “victor’s crown of life” (2:10). The fifth seal in Revelation 6:9 reveals the “souls of those having been slain” due to “the testimony (μαρτυρίαν) they had retained,” which parallels the depiction in Revelation 20:4 of the “souls of those having been beheaded due to the testimony (μαρτυρίαν) of Jesus” who are, consequently, reigning on thrones with “authority to judge.”⁶⁶ Indeed, the only other figure besides Jesus (1:5) labeled “faithful witness” is Antipas from Pergamum (2:13), “who was killed among you—where Satan resides.”

To mirror the triad of good’s politics of conquest, then, is to bear witness faithfully to the testimony of Jesus that, if necessary, submits to suffering, sacrifice, and even death. In fact, Revelation 13:9–10 blatantly prohibits violent acts by the churches when confronted by the triad of evil’s abrasive politics of conquest: “If anyone has an ear, let him hear: ‘If anyone is to be taken as a prisoner of war, as a prisoner of war he goes off. If anyone is to be killed by the sword, by the sword he is to be killed.’ This requires patient endurance and faithfulness (πίστις) from the saints.” Shockingly, this call for sacrificial nonviolence is juxtaposed with the depiction of the furious dragon waging war against those “retaining the testimony (μαρτυρίαν) of Jesus” (12:17) and the great prostitute drunk on the “blood of the witnesses (μαρτύρων) of Jesus” (17:6). Within the conquest motif, then, the Apocalypse exhorts its audience to mirror the triad of good in the reaction to the violent assault of the triad of evil and its followers.

65 Thompson, *Revelation*, 191.

66 See also Rev 11:3, 7, where the two witnesses (μάρτυσιν) are killed by the beast from the abyss upon the completion of their testimony (μαρτυρίαν).

The anti-imperial assumption, at this point, creates an awkward tension with the sacrificial images and exhortations in Revelation. Although the non-violent call is widely recognized in Revelation scholarship,⁶⁷ its existence presents an uncomfortable incongruity with the anti-imperial trajectory. So while Collins says that “John would rather have seen conflict between Rome and Christians intensified,”⁶⁸ she also writes “the book of Revelation was written to avoid violence rather than to encourage it. The faithful are called upon to endure, not to take up arms.”⁶⁹ Likewise, Kraybill calls Revelation a “vitriolic attack upon Rome,” and yet he also concedes:

[John] longs for Rome’s demise, but never issues a call for violent revolution. In contrast to the Zealot model of armed resistance, faithful Christians must respond with patient endurance rather than violence: “If you are to be taken captive, into captivity you go; if you kill with the sword, with the sword you must be killed” (Rev 13:10).⁷⁰

The anti-imperial assumption about Revelation, then, cannot easily dismiss the nonviolent call inherent in the politics of conquest of the triad of good. If the central target of the book of Revelation is the Roman Empire, then the call for nonviolence is consigned to either hopeless surrender to the might of Rome (i.e., they had no other option) or a dissonant position in a futile attempt of resistance by just being ‘different’ from the violent empire.⁷¹ If the central target is Satan, however, then the exhortation of sacrificial nonviolence becomes the means through which conquest is secured.

Significantly, in Revelation 12, the dragon unsuccessfully launches an assault on the newborn “male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron rod” (12:4b–5) and on the angelic army in heaven (12:7–9). This defeat of the triad of evil’s chief leader is celebrated in 12:10, “At this very moment, the salvation and the dominion and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ came into existence. For the accuser of our brothers, the one accusing them before our God day and night, was thrown down.” In the next verse, the catalyst of this cosmic conquest is revealed: “They conquered (ἐνίκησαν) [Satan] through

67 Kraybill, *Imperial*, 196, 201; Blount, *Witness*, 39, 82, and 122 (n. 79); Friesen, *Imperial*, 190–191; Collins, *Crisis*, 156; cf. Söding, “Heilig,” 49. For discussion on violence in other apocalypses, see Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, 215, 219, 277–279, 313, 337, 372.

68 Collins, *Crisis*, 124.

69 Ibid., 171.

70 Kraybill, *Imperial*, 201.

71 Cf. Friesen, *Imperial*, 200.

the blood of the Lamb and through the word of their testimony (μαρτυρίας), for they did not cling to life even in the face of death.”⁷² When the sacrificial death of Jesus is imitated by his followers, the key antagonist of Revelation is conquered. Thus, the nonviolent exhortation is an articulation of the politics of conquest of the triad of good through which the defeat of Satan is secured and awaits consummation in God’s triumphal procession.

This Alter-Imperial interpretation brings lucidity not only to the contentious call for nonviolence in Revelation, but also to the peculiar possibility, and at times depiction, of the repentance of the rebellious agents of evil. For example, although persistently characterized as followers of the triad of evil,⁷³ the “kings of the earth” favorably “carry their glory into [the new Jerusalem]” in Revelation 21:24. After describing this oddity as “more than a little surprising,” Steven J. Friesen concludes, “The literary background and utopian character of Revelation 21 suggest that the statement [in Rev 21:24] offers us insight into John’s view of the true goal of earthly rulers.”⁷⁴

Similarly, the false prophetess Jezebel is offered “time that she might repent . . . from her sexual immorality” in Revelation 2:21, “but she does not want to repent.” So she is promised a “bed of suffering” along with all of “the ones committing adultery with her . . . unless they repent of her deeds” (2:22). In regards to this passage, Leonard L. Thompson remarks that in Revelation, “even the most blasphemous have the possibility of transformation through repentance and can cross the boundary from unfaith to faith.”⁷⁵ So like the rebellious churches of Asia Minor (2:5, 16, 21–22; 3:3, 19), the followers of the triad of evil are called to repentance and not merely consigned to destruction (9:20, 21; 16:9, 11).

Once again, the anti-imperial assumption that envisions the church as “pitted against the evil empire”⁷⁶ creates an awkward tension in Revelation’s imagery, given that part of the goal for the triad of good is the repentance of the agents of evil. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza summarizes, “Only when we acknowledge that Revelation hopes for the conversion of the nations, in response to the Christian witness and preaching, will we be able to see that

72 The last phrase “for they did not cling to life even in the face of death” is the NRSV translation of the idiomatic: καὶ οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν ἄχρι θανάτου.

73 Rev 6:15 (cf. 19:18); 16:14; 17:2 (cf. 18:3, 9), 18; 19:19.

74 Friesen, *Imperial*, 209.

75 Thompson, *Revelation*, 84.

76 Thompson, *Revelation*, 192 writes, “Here John is unambiguous. Within his vision of reality, he and all those who wear the white garments are pitted against the evil empire.”

it does not advocate a ‘theology of resentment’...⁷⁷ The hope for repentance seems to subvert the anti-imperial assertion and yet seems perfectly congruent with the alter-empire’s particular politics of conquest.

The Implications of Revelation 20:7–10

The goal of Empire Studies is to resurrect the voice of the marginalized, not to detect only subversion in a subject text. It is far different to suggest that a subject text uses Roman imperial imagery to construct an Alter-Imperial message than to say that the imagery is used with the sole intent of attacking the Roman Empire. On some level, the sovereign narrative dictates the grammar of the marginalized voice. Therefore, imperial language in a subject text does not mean the empire is the center of the discussion or that the intent is exclusively subversive; instead, the subject narrative’s interaction with the empire may be complicit, subversive, both, or neither.

In Revelation 20:7–10, the release of Satan for God’s triumphal procession functions as a multifaceted clarifying agent for the churches of Asia Minor. At this climactic moment in the Apocalypse, the Roman triumph is a ‘point of conversation’ with the sovereign narrative that provides the grammar of conquest and defeat that includes a delay and imminent consummation. Significantly, Revelation attributes the position of the chief enemy leader in the triumphal procession to Satan and not Rome. This application clarifies not only the identity of the subject text’s primary target, but also the identity of the alter-empire that Jesus’ sacrifice creates.

The physical and non-physical persecution of the Domitianic Roman Empire generates a discordant conclusion to Revelation’s proclamation that Jesus is “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (1:5) who creates “a kingdom and priests” (5:9; cf. 1:6) to be “sovereign on the earth” (5:10). Thus, if the battle is with Rome, then the apparent inference is failure for the church—for if the measure of conquest is prosperity, territory, or military victories, then Rome is the clear victor. Yet, if the battle is with “the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan,” then conquest is redefined and, indeed, the conclusion is secure: the battle has already been won through Christ’s suffering and sacrifice.

Therefore, Revelation’s demand for nonviolence and hope for repentance calls the church to interact with the empire in a manner that only makes sense if Rome is not the primary target. From the perspective of the prostitute, the alter-empire’s politics of conquest fail. From the perspective of the cosmic

77 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Invitation to the Book of Revelation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 119.

triads, the alter-empire's politics of conquest secure the victory celebrated in God's triumphal procession, in which Satan, the chief enemy leader, marches bound in chains (Rev 20:7–10). As Friesen notes:

The demonic pretender to world dominion is worshipped for his ability to defeat all opponents [Rev 13:4, 7–8]. The figure who is truly worthy of receiving worship and dominion, on the other hand, is described precisely as the one who was victimized and defeated [Rev 5:5–6, 9–10, 12]. . . . The meaning of history is revealed in the one who suffers violence, not in the one who inflicts violence.⁷⁸

The illusion of victory is dissolved when the true enemy is clarified. To attack Rome with the weapons of Rome (violence) falls prey to the Satanic deception that Rome is the true target. Satan as the chief enemy leader in God's triumphal procession, then, reorients the churches of Asia Minor to attack the true target (the dragon) with the Lamb's politics of conquest (Rev 12:11) in a battle that is not in jeopardy but merely awaiting consummation.

This Alter-Imperial perspective allows for complicity with the Roman sovereign narrative (Rev 17:18) and simultaneous subversion (17:16–17), alongside of a constant call and plea for the churches to witness with the hope of repentance for the people of Rome (21:24). Other times, neither complicity nor subversion are in view, for the Apocalypse uses Roman imagery to clarify a cosmic battle that far surpasses the empire. Thus, the implementation of Roman triumphal procession imagery in Revelation 20:7–10 does not necessitate an anti-imperial intent. Instead, the Alter-Imperial paradigm reveals that, in Revelation, Rome is just collateral damage in the cosmic story that involves not just the destruction of Satan but the construction of the alter-empire. Rome provides the grammar while Eden provides the target.

The Alter-Imperial Paradigm: Revelation and Empire Studies

To answer the question, 'How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?' the Alter-Imperial paradigm repositions the theoretical background to engage the subject text through 'points of conversation' with the Flavian socio-historical context. Methodologically, then, the imperial propaganda that communicates the Roman sovereign narrative provides an entry point for the subject narrative's imagery. Given the 92–96 CE date of the Apocalypse and

⁷⁸ Friesen, *Imperial*, 176. See also Blount, *Witness*, 69–70, 87.

the centrality of the Roman triumph in 71 CE for the Flavian foundational myth, triumphal procession imagery emerges as a likely candidate for interaction with the subject text. The parallels between Revelation 19:11–20:10 and the Roman triumph bring clarity to a notoriously enigmatic text (the release of Satan) and, by implication, to imperial imagery and interaction throughout the Apocalypse.

The Alter-Imperial paradigm, however, does not intend to replace or supplant Revelation scholarship over the past 125 years, but integrate the studies into this broader approach. For example, studies on the imperial cult in Revelation⁷⁹ or the Leto-Apollo combat myth in Revelation 12⁸⁰ are valuable parallels to the Roman Empire on their own accord. Nevertheless, if these ‘points of conversation’ are assimilated into the Alter-Imperial paradigm, sharper insights emerge through questions like: How did the imperial cult function in Flavian propaganda? What role did the combat myth play in the inauguration of the Flavian dynasty? Does Domitian use images of Apollo in his unique sovereign narrative?

In other words, moving from the specific observations (e.g., the imperial cult, combat myth genres, etc.) to the broader context (i.e., the Roman sovereign narrative in Flavian propaganda) highlights the importance of the specificity of the contributions from Friesen, Kraybill, Collins, and others while moving the parallels beyond anti-imperial assumptions through further analysis. The ‘points of conversation’ in the subject text must be used to resurrect the marginalized voice through questions like: Is the parallel used with the intention to subvert the Empire? Or does the imagery support the Empire? Or is the imagery simply used as grammar to make a point that is far *larger* than the empire?

This analysis treats the imperial parallel as intentional, but it does not assume the intent. The questions do not assert subversion or complicity, but instead, they allow for either or both or neither. For as Revelation 20:7–10 illustrates, Roman imagery may be used in the construction of the alter-empire to engage an enemy that is of greater significance in the subject narrative than the empire itself. Thus, the empire provides the grammar but is not the primary target.

In addition, the Alter-Imperial paradigm's shift to the broader Roman context encourages Revelation scholars to ask different questions and view passages anew. For instance, as discussed in the introduction, the Leviathan-Behemoth myth only offers an aesthetic explanation for the two beasts in

79 Friesen, *Imperial*; Kraybill, *Imperial*.

80 Collins, *Combat Myth*.

Revelation 13—an intentional modification of Daniel 7:1–7—without substantive elucidation. Broadening the imperial inquiry through the Alter-Imperial paradigm, a potential ‘point of conversation’ emerges in the question, ‘Does the Remus and Romulus myth (found on Flavian coinage)⁸¹ offer an explanation for the twin beasts in Revelation 13?’

Similarly, the Alter-Imperial paradigm may help clarify the debate and confusion surrounding the referent to the seven kings in Revelation 17:10. Although Revelation scholars argue extensively over which emperors fulfill the seven kings parallel,⁸² in the broader Roman context, the emperors were not the sole rulers that surface in the imperial sovereign narrative. Indeed, the foundational myth of Rome begins with seven kings starting with Romulus and ending with the usurpation of the republic-led Senate. Thus, the Alter-Imperial paradigm asks, ‘Are the seven kings in Revelation 17 an allusion to the seven kings of Rome that were replaced with the republic (cf. the “ten kings” in Rev 17:12–14)?’

While other questions could be asked,⁸³ in the Alter-Imperial paradigm, the purpose of these potential parallels is not to find new and provocative imperial referents to the imagery in Revelation. Instead, these potential ‘points of conversation’ should be used to observe how the Apocalypse interacts with the Roman sovereign narrative in its construction of an alter-empire. In other words, the Alter-Imperial paradigm both encourages and tempers our exploration of the question, ‘How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?’

Still further, the Alter-Imperial paradigm carries implications for Empire Studies beyond just the book of Revelation. It challenges Empire Studies (e.g., Paul, Jesus, etc.) to stop assuming anti-imperial intent and to engage in the complexities of the subject voice that speaks on its own accord. The pursuit of strictly anti-Roman parallels in the subject text is not a resurrection of the marginalized voice but an agenda-driven analysis that dictates the contours of the text. This approach, ironically, subjects the text to the anti-imperial tyranny of the Empire Studies interpreter who is forced to ignore or gloss over texts like 1 Peter 2:13–21.

In contrast, a perspective that suggests that the early Christian community was more focused on the construction of an alter-empire than the deconstruction of the Roman Empire allows for both Romans 13:1–7 and 1 Thessalonians 5:1–3—complicity and subversion. For as Revelation 20:7–10

81 Vespasian: *RIC* 70; 194; 204; 228; 241; 442. Titus: *RIC* 66. See also Virgil, *Aen.* 1.267–296; Suet., *Aug.* 7; Dio Cass. 53.16.6–8; and the Ara Pacis Augustae.

82 See chapter 4 above.

83 Such as: Does the temple in heaven with its doors “opened” in Revelation 15:5 parallel the ritual of the temple of Janus in the Roman sovereign narrative?

shows us, Rome is simply too small of a target for the early Christian communities; they envision their battle on a far grander stage than what the public transcript could even contain. Rome is just another prostitute in league with the triad of evil—for Satan is the bound enemy leader who marches at the climactic moment of God's triumphal procession, not the emperors. Therefore, to reduce imperial inquiry down to mere subversion is to ignore the important nuance and purpose of the subject text: the construction of a kingdom that far surpasses the *limes* of the Roman world.

Appendix A: The Relation of Dominance and Resistance from James C. Scott

Adapted by Shane J. Wood

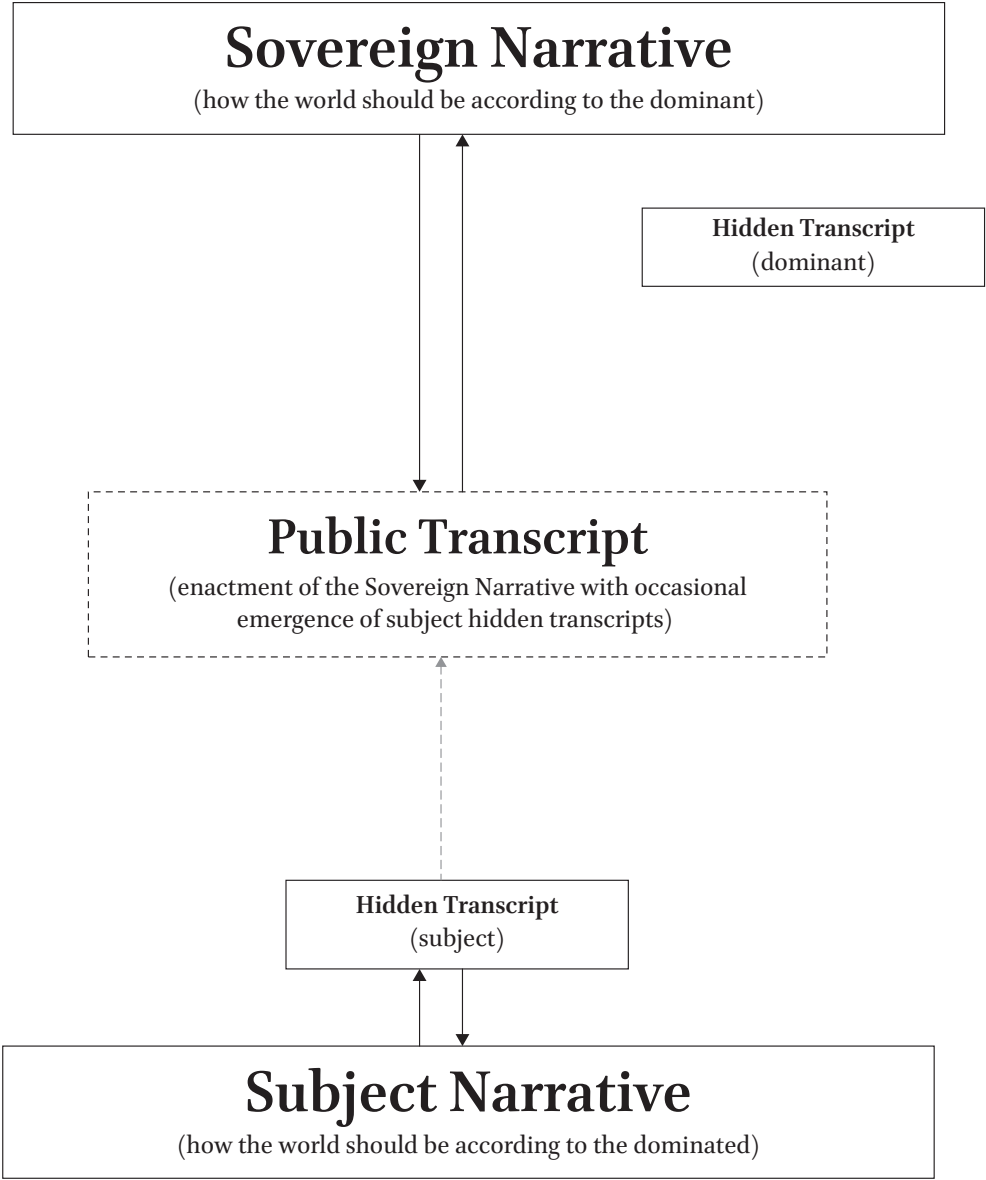
Hidden Transcript
(dominant)

Public Transcript
(enactment of the Sovereign Narrative with occasional emergence of subject hidden transcripts)

Hidden Transcript
(subject)

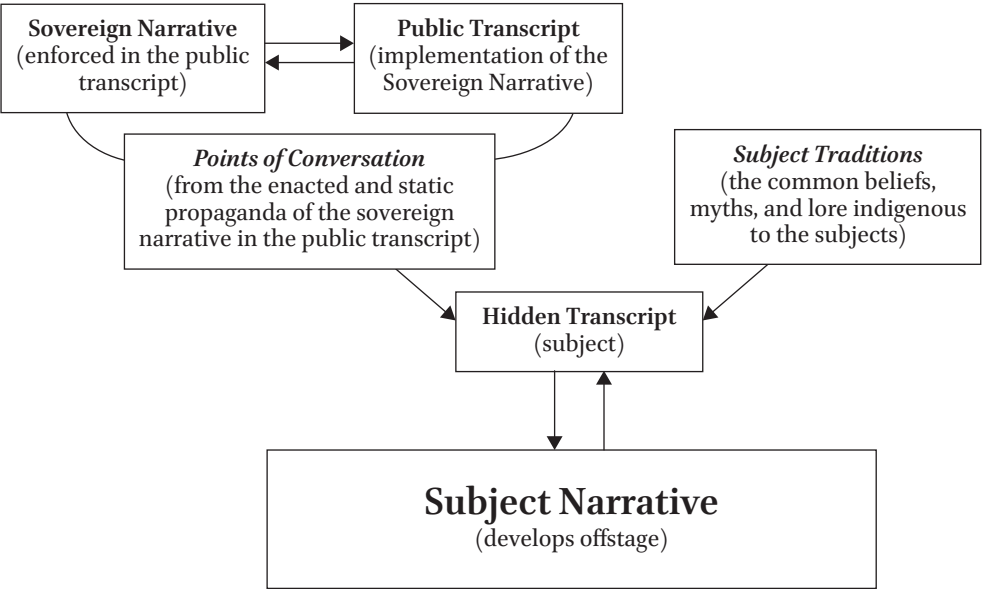
Appendix B: The Relation of Dominance and Resistance from James C. Scott

with Key Elements Added by Shane J. Wood



Appendix C: The Dynamics of the Subject Narrative

By Shane J. Wood



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